



**Plate 109.** Lieutenant Philip Boak holding a Swift on board *HMS Echo*, Red Sea, July 2014. "The bird was foundering on the bridge wing, so I picked it up, just long enough for the photo. It then scrambled free and leapt for freedom over the side. I remember it very nearly plunged into the water, but pulled up at the last moment". © Midshipman C Fisher

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The Society was formed in 1947 to provide a forum for the exchange of information on seabirds, and land birds at sea, by members for whom birdwatching is a spare time recreation and hobby. It also aims to coordinate the efforts of individual members using standardised recording methods so that observations can be of value to the professional ornithologist. In addition to the promotion of observations afloat, the RNBWS organises fieldwork and expeditions, often in cooperation with the Army and RAF Ornithological Societies.

The Royal Naval Birdwatching Society is the only organisation in the world which collects, collates and publishes data on seabirds and landbirds at sea. Membership is open to all those, regardless of nationality, who share a common interest in birds at sea. Instructions for joining can be found on the Society website [www.rnbws.org.uk](http://www.rnbws.org.uk) or by application to the Secretary.

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**Material for publication** in *Sea Swallow* should be sent to the editor. Ideally submissions should be in MS Word or rtf format, but other formats are acceptable. Graphics should be jpeg or tiff. Accompanying photographs sent electronically should always be the original camera files, and not cropped in any way. Contributions are welcome at any time, but if for inclusion in the next edition should reach the editor by 30 July.

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Plate 1. Martin Alabaster, Ghana November 2011. © Martin Alabaster

# Chairman's Foreword

by Rear Admiral Martin Alabaster

I am pleased to report that all past volumes of *Sea Swallow* are now available on the Society's website and many members have said how much they have enjoyed delving into those old issues of the magazine. Our next big task is the upgrading of the website and the database of seabird records so that it is more usable and easier to administer.

The Committee remains focused on maintaining the right strategic direction for the Society in terms of the balance between 'Science' (our particular reputation in terms of seabird observation, the database of records and *Sea Swallow* as a specialist journal), 'Members' (the provision of opportunities for members to pursue their birding interests) and 'Conservation'. I hope we are getting it about right, but I am personally keen to identify a project to which we can contribute - probably in terms of both funding and people - and thereby further all three aims.

As to this issue of *Sea Swallow*, it certainly demonstrates the balance we seek and I doubt that there has been another in all the volumes that have gone before that has a greater global span. Here we have Atlantic articles ranging from Greenland to Antarctica via the East coast of the USA; three articles from the Indian Ocean; no fewer than four from the Pacific; some Mediterranean updates and three stories from home waters. I particularly enjoyed Richard Porter's article about Dartmouth. I was born there whilst my father was on the College staff and I subsequently served there four times and contributed to several BRNC bird surveys.

All in all, the Editor has worked his magic again and delivered a mix that will I hope, like the BBC, inform, educate and entertain.

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## Editor's Note

Rear Admiral Martin Alabaster, in his foreword (opposite), briefly mentions the placing of all past copies of *Sea Swallow* on the website. This was actually a mammoth task, and was done entirely by the chairman himself, which probably explains his reluctance to dwell on it. Michael Casement however, himself a distinguished former Chairman and Editor of *Sea Swallow*, was quick to appreciate the achievement.

*"Dear Martin,*

*Many thanks for your splendid scanning project, which enabled me to see once more one of my earliest reports for Sea Swallow, in issue no 6, where Gerald Tuck extracted several bits from the numerous pages of my HMS Vanguard report. My memory having been jogged, I can remember the incident quite well. In November 1952 we were sent up to the far north to carry out Arctic trials of various types of equipment and clothing - well north of Jan Mayen - right up to the ice edge, when we were struck by a northerly gale and mountainous seas which covered the whole ship with a cocoon of ice. The seaboat was smashed under the weight of ice, and we had to de-ice the 15" gun barrels with explosives - strips of cortex!*

*I really do congratulate you in undertaking the massive task putting all Sea Swallows, plus an invaluable Index, on-line. Fantastic. Admirals do have their uses... !"*

Quite so.

**David Dobson**

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**Plate 2.** Public open day. The Taiko Trust places huge importance on education, and as part of this project we held several open days. These were well attended and provided locals with the chance to see the birds at close range.

## Establishing a new colony of Chatham Island Albatross in the Chatham Islands, New Zealand

by Mike Bell, Secretary, the Chatham Islands Taiko Trust

(All photographs taken by the author)

The Chatham Island Albatross (*Thalassarche eremita*) is a threatened species which is presently restricted to a single breeding location - the Pyramid Rock, literally a tiny rock pile in the middle of the Roaring Forties. The Pyramid is the most southern rock outcrop in the Chatham Islands (800km east of Christchurch, New Zealand), and is home to nearly 5,000 breeding pairs of this beautiful ocean wanderer. Although recent research suggests the population is stable, with just a single breeding colony population threats are more magnified. Therefore, in a bold and ambitious project the Chatham Island Taiko Trust is attempting to establish a new population by undertaking a chick translocation project.

As reported in *Sea Swallow* 63 the Chatham Island Taiko Trust is a community based conservation organization, dedicated to protecting the endemic birdlife of the Chatham Islands; a real grass-roots, hands-on band of motivated volunteers and professional conservation managers. As reported previously, the Taiko Trust has made considerable gains in protecting the Magenta petrel (*Pterodroma magentae*), which has seen its population increase by 30% in the past three years.

The scientific evidence is overwhelming that global climate change is happening and that it presents a very serious risk to biodiversity (BirdLife International 2008). Of the world's threatened seabird species, 40% are currently at risk from impacts of climate change on breeding sites. Global climate change means that the Chatham Islands are likely to experience an increase in frequency, duration and intensity of severe weather events (Mullan et. al. 2005). Previous studies show that albatross populations in the Chatham Islands have been significantly affected by habitat modification caused by severe weather events. These modifications included stripping of vegetation and erosion of soil, taking decades to recover (Taylor 2000, Department of Conservation 2001). Therefore, an increase in such severe weather is likely to impact the Chatham Island albatross population if their sole breeding site is modified in a way that negatively influences breeding potential or success. Consequently, it would be beneficial to create a colony in an area where vegetation and soil are more stable, and thus help reduce the risk to this species from global climate change.



**Plate 3.** Transferred Chatham Island albatross chick sitting on artificial nest at the Point Gap colony.



**Plate 4.** Mike and Dave Bell feeding one of the 60 transferred Chatham Island Albatross chicks at the Point Gap colony.



**Plate 5.** Transferred chick stretching wings; the chicks were highly active on their nests, often stretching their wings and feet.

After reviewing a number of sites, a release site was selected in an area of protected private land in the south west corner of Main Chatham. Although this site's habitat is different from that of the Pyramid, it is similar to the coastal cliffs and ledges used by related albatross species on sub-Antarctic islands. The benefit of the site is that it has deep soil, which will mean it is more robust to withstand severe weather. GPS tracking has shown that Chatham Island Albatross regularly commute past the site. Significantly the site has suitable infrastructure nearby to support a project of this scale - the Taiko Trust's field base Taiko Camp.

An artificial colony was created at the release site in preparation for first chick's arrival in January 2014. As Chatham Island Albatross nest on pillar nests, we developed artificial nests to replace these. For these we used large plastic pant pots filled with peat. Throughout the site twenty albatross decoys were deployed, and a sound system broadcast albatross calls to replicate an active albatross colony.



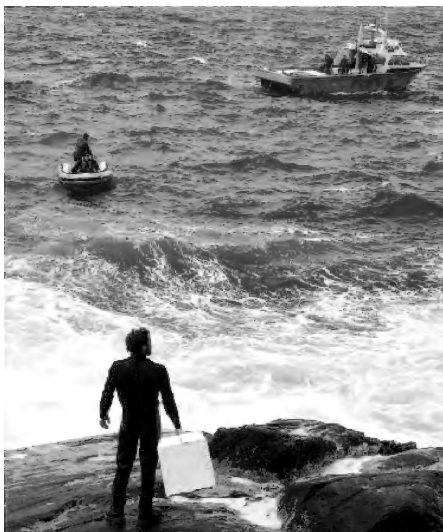
**Plate 6.** The Pyramid; the southernmost land mass in the Chatham Islands; essentially a rock jumble poking out of the rough southern ocean.



**Plate 7.** Near-fledged transferred Chatham Island albatross chick begging from one of the decoys, proving the chicks had not become imprinted on people.

**Plate 8.** The release site, the Point Gap colony, with artificial nests intermixed with albatross decoys to replicate an active colony.





**Plate 9.** Dave Bell on the shoreline of the Pyramid, timing the passing of an albatross chick in its transfer box to Robin and Jason Seymour in the zodiac.



**Plate 10.** Mike Bell placing a Chatham Island albatross chick in the transfer box, the first stage of this chick's journey to a new colony.

In January 2014 fifty chicks were transferred from the Pyramid, with a further 60 in January 2015. Sounding easy on paper, it was more difficult in real life. The Pyramid is extremely difficult to land on, with the only landing site a small ledge jutting out into the ocean from a near vertical cliff face. Transport to the island was provided by a local fishing vessel, and after a 4 hour steam the zodiac was launched to get ashore. With a keen eye on the sea, you time your jump so that with a pinch of luck you arrive on the island, and don't fall into the sea!

After climbing up the steep ledges, the breeding colony is reached: small fluffy albatross chicks sitting tightly on their pillar nests; adults coming and going feeding chicks; non-breeding birds courting - the island is alive with activity and noise. It is a truly remarkable place: there is simply nothing quite like the scene from within a large albatross colony.

With limited time, the team quickly gets to work. The chicks are carefully selected following measurements and a health examination. Only chicks which fit the right parameters are chosen. After ringing with an engraved coloured ring, the chicks are placed in a transfer box, a large plastic box lined with foam to protect the chick during landings to follow. Each box is then carefully carried down the steep rock face to the shore. Here, somebody is dressed in a wet suit to assist the transfer to the zodiac. That was not easy. The boat was often swamped by waves, timing was essential to ensure the box and bird didn't end up in the sea. The zodiac then ferried the birds to the waiting fishing boat.

It took a little over five hours to select, collect and move all the chicks to the fishing boat. Once aboard, we steamed to the release area, where we were able to land directly below the actual release site, and reduce transport time by up to two hours. The chicks were then carried up the hill, and placed onto the artificial nests. In both seasons the transfer went without a hitch, and all the birds arrived at the colony in good condition in the late afternoon.

For the following four months the chicks were fed daily on a diet of squid, salmon and mackerel. As the chicks grew, and their development requirements changed, the diet was altered. Broadly, we provided increasing amounts of food as the chicks grew, but then reduced the food intake in the last few weeks before fledging. Throughout the four month chick rearing period each chick ate 50–60kg of squid and fish.

In the first transfer all of the chicks fledged successfully, but in the 2015 transfer six chicks died due to complications from heat stress. We have had an unusually hot and dry summer this year, and that caused problems with many other seabirds too.

The young birds gradually changed from small down covered chicks to sleek ocean travellers and in their last few weeks ashore they spent considerable time flapping as they built up their flight muscles. One of the interesting discoveries this year is that the chicks fledge at night, an unexpected finding. By the end of April all of the chicks had fledged. They are not expected to return for five years, and will not start breeding until at least seven years old.

As long as we have sufficient funds, the Taiko Trust will carry out further chick translocations for the next three seasons, and we hope this will provide a sufficient pool of birds to create a founder population to develop a new colony. In addition, this coastal site is being protected with a predator proof fence, providing other seabird restoration opportunities.

This is a significant project, not only for Chatham Island Albatross, but for albatross conservation in general, for the methods developed here could be used to help secure a brighter future for the 17 other species of albatross currently listed as threatened.

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**Plate 11.** Another view of the public open day (see also Plate 2).



Plate 12. Main Light on the Isle of May. © H Scott

## Seabird studies on the Isle of May

by Mark Newell

The Isle of May National Nature Reserve might only be a small piece of basalt barely a mile long, but its moniker of ‘the jewel of the Forth’ reveals its importance to many people over the centuries. Standing as it does in the mouth of the Firth of Forth, off the east coast of Scotland, the light from this jewel has guided shipping past its cliffs for nearly 400 years. In ornithological terms, it holds a prominent place in tracking migration, hosting the oldest continuously run bird observatory in the UK. However, the Isle of May is also synonymous with studies of seabirds that have been undertaken annually for over 40 years, making it one of the most studied colonies in the world.

Up to a quarter of a million seabirds return to the isle each year to breed, and the close proximity and accessibility provide superb opportunities to observe and record various aspects of their ecology. Initially the focus of the seabirds was on the Atlantic Puffins which, when the research was started in 1972 by Mike Harris, only numbered a few thousand pairs; however, their numbers swelled to reach nearly 70,000 pairs by the turn of the century. Individual colour-ringed studies enable annual survival to be estimated, and also reveal just how faithful puffins are, with the vast majority returning each year to the same mate and same burrow. By examining their burrows twice a season it is possible to determine their breeding success and by collecting the fish brought to the chicks we can undertake detailed diet studies. These three areas of research (breeding success, survival and diet) have formed the framework of the seabird studies on the Isle of May ever since and with Sarah Wanless joining Mike Harris in the 1980s the work expanded to include five other breeding species: Common Guillemot, Razorbill, Black-legged Kittiwake, European Shag and Northern Fulmar.





Most seabirds are long-lived with typically high adult survival rates, but breeding success and juvenile survival are more variable. Seabirds breeding on the Isle of May are piscivorous and obtain their food within a few tens of kilometres from the colony in summer. The principal prey is the Lesser Sandeel, *Ammodytes marinus*, and its abundance and availability play a pivotal role in determining the breeding success of the birds. The sandeel is a species which thrives in colder waters and in years of warming seas the seabirds bring fewer, smaller fish of lower quality to their chicks and consequently the breeding success can be badly affected. By mist netting puffins and collecting dropped fish it has been possible to see a clear decline in the size of the sandeels over the decades and a switch to other, less nutritional, species when sandeels are in short supply. It tends to be the surface feeders such as Kittiwakes which suffer most when sandeel stocks are low. The Isle of May work has been able to demonstrate strong effects of warming seas on the breeding success of this species with worryingly low productivity at temperatures which climate models are predicting to occur in the future.

Recent research on the Isle of May has also focused on the effects of extreme weather events. An intense gale during the peak of the 2011 breeding season demonstrated that wind speed as well as wave height cause considerable breeding failures but there were striking variations among species, with Razorbill hardest hit (Newell *et al.* 2015). No adults were thought to have succumbed to this event and one lost breeding season would not severely affect the seabird populations. However, a greater frequency of storms, as predicted by climate models, could result in significant effects on seabird populations. Maybe it is more than a coincidence that of the nine strongest summer storms to have hit the Isle of May in the last fifty years, seven have occurred in the last twenty years and three in the last five years.



**Plate 13 (opposite).** Seabird observation hides along the South cliffs. **Plate 14.** South Cliffs during rough seas on 23 May 2011. © both *M Newell*



**Plate 15.** Mark Newell extracting Shag chicks for ringing. © H Scott

Adult survival tends to be hardest hit in winter at a time when seabirds are usually dispersed far from the colony and the losses are only detected the following breeding season. Recent winters have allowed us to understand the impact of extreme weather at this time of year. Shags can be greatly affected by prolonged onshore winds as they tend to feed close to the coast, and strong winds create conditions that are too turbid for them to forage effectively. In the winters of 2012–13 and 2013–14 there were periods of intense wind and large numbers of shags were found dead along the east coast of Scotland and northern England. Since birds are ringed each year at a number of colonies, we knew the age, sex and colony of origin of many of the birds found. As a result, it was possible to determine that different colonies were affected in different winters and that juveniles suffered the most overall. In another recent case which occurred in March 2013, large numbers of dead puffins were washed ashore in unprecedented numbers (Harris & Elkins 2013). However, by recording the numbers breeding the following summer it was possible to determine that the populations were largely unaffected indicating that this level of mortality was not unusual but, in most years, mortality takes place further offshore and so goes undetected.

The foraging distribution of Isle of May seabirds has been measured by attaching tracking devices to breeding birds which record location at sea. Some of the first ever tracking of Northern hemisphere seabirds was undertaken on the Isle of May in the 1980s, and this research continues to this day. Initially location was obtained from radio telemetry which was extremely effective in providing the first understanding of the areas where the seabirds were foraging but it was very labour intensive and the positions obtained were not very precise. In more recent years, radio telemetry has been superseded by GPS technology, which provides extremely accurate positions. In addition to understanding the frequency, distance and duration of foraging trips the information gathered can highlight key locations that are most frequently used for feeding. This information has been used by policy makers to understand the effects of proposed offshore renewable energy installations and propose Marine Protection Areas.

While much of the research has focused on the links between foraging behaviour, diet and breeding success in the summer, the winter ecology of seabirds is critically important. This is because it is in winter when most adult mortality occurs, and populations of seabirds, as long-lived species, are more sensitive to changes in adult survival than breeding success. To record the location of seabirds over the winter, geo-location (GLS) devices are used instead of GPS because, although less accurate, they are much smaller and can readily be attached to a leg ring and carried by the bird for 12 months. As a result, they have revolutionised our understanding of migration patterns of Isle of May seabirds. For example, they have shown that Isle of May Puffins spend part of the winter out in the Atlantic and therefore don't, as traditionally thought, remain wholly in the North Sea (Harris *et al.* 2010). It has also been possible to record the vast distances that Kittiwakes travel to their wintering quarters off Newfoundland (Bogdanova *et al.* 2011).

The work on the Isle of May demonstrates that long-term research is vital in detecting and attributing changes in seabirds and their marine environment in the UK. It also allows short term events, such as storms, to be placed in the wider context of longer term changes resulting from, for example, climate warming. The hope is that the Isle of May seabird study continues to shine a light on the fortunes of some of the UK's most important species for many years to come.



**Plate 16.** Puffin caught in mist-net for ringing. © M Newell



**Plate 17.** Extracting a netted Puffin. © M Newell



Plate 18. Puffin fitted with a datalogger. © E Watts

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**Plate 19.** Aerial view of Dungeness in 2011. © J Flegg

# The fate of Dungeness

Dr WRP Bourne & D Walker

*The first part of this article, Dr WRP Bourne, was written in 1967, and the second part, by David Walker, Warden of the Dungeness Observatory since 1989, in 2015.*

Dungeness is the greatest shingle bed in England. An examination of a large scale map gives an impression of how the forces which mould the landscape act. As the shingle came east along the south coast of Britain it built up in bank after bank, isolating the Cinque Ports and Romney and Walland Marshes from the sea. Tidal currents then remoulded them into a great promontory defending the new reclaimed lands. This promontory has played a most important part in bird migration and conservation work, as the home of the Kentish Plover, as a field for studies by the Alexanders, N.H. Joy and others early in the twentieth century, as one of the first really important RSPB reserves, and since the last war, as the site of the major bird observatory closest to London. The area and its history are well described in the first decennial report of the observatory, 1952–62.

I first visited Dungeness in its hey-day, in June 1946, when we made a great pilgrimage there with hoarded petrol. I was then a nasty little birdnesting schoolboy, and the sort of records retained are better not specified in detail, but as it was my first visit to a great seabird colony it left a lasting impression of a state of affairs we are never likely to see again in southern England. The area had been forbidden during the war, when, in any case, few people had the time or the petrol to visit it. In addition much of it had been mined or used for ranges which acted as a further deterrent to visitors. The gull and tern colonies which had been cultivated with such care by the RSPB before the war had flourished unchecked for years until they had become a standing temptation to human and animal predators. We were seeing them just before their downfall.

After a long haul through Sussex we came out across the deserted marsh through Lydd and were dropped in the middle of an open strip of road crossing a rippled waste of shingle, without a person, vehicle or building in sight. We set out across the interminable stones, flushing a pair of Stone Curlew on the way, until we came to the Open Pits and found the water surrounded by a continuous belt of Black-headed Gulls' nests, yards deep, with the birds hanging over them in a great, squalling cloud.

After luxuriating in this spectacle for a while we walked on west past acres of Herring Gulls, as well as, if I remember rightly, Lesser Black-backs and Common Gulls, until we came to a belt of terns stretching east and west as far as we could see. We saw nobody else all day. The records of quite what was present and breeding on Dungeness at this time seem rather incomplete; Dungeness deserves to become a legend, like the Lost Land of Lyonesse, for it is inadequate to express what has gone in mere figures.

Later in the 1940s and early 1950s I got to know the western flanks of the area well, at a time when the Kentish Plover were making their last stand around Rye Harbour mouth. A curious obscurity seems to hang over the end of the story of this species too; it often seems to be thought of as a bird of Dungeness, but accounts suggest that it never really was, but originally preferred the sandy bays on either side until it was pushed out on to the inhospitable shingle by holiday-makers. The last two or three birds used to patter around on the wet sand at the Rother outflow; it was difficult to understand where they thought they might nest, but it was said that they tried on the shingle west of the harbour, where their chicks were unable to reach the sea across the inner sill of the concrete road bounding the shore laid down during the war. If this was so it should have been foreseen and something done about it; now, in summer, it is difficult to see where the birds could find space to land among the myriads of holiday-makers.

Later still I heard the Director-General of the Nature Conservancy fulminating against the proposal to build a nuclear power station on the seaward side of the last great expanse of open shingle, already increasingly empty of birds. Now in 1967 it towers over the scene, and the remaining beaches amount to little more than sordid back-lots, churned by the military, eaten into by gravel pits, over-run with vermin and colonised by alien vegetation, by visitors along the coast and the increasingly well-drained, mechanised marsh inland. It is interesting to see though more passing seabirds at the power station outflow, and entertaining to observe how the beach fights domestication, washing the shingle away in front of the buildings so that it has to be returned in lorries. In general, Dungeness has been tamed, and on the twenty-first anniversary of my first visit the features which used to be the making of the place were no longer recognisable.

## References

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**Bill Bourne, 1967**

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# Dungeness in 2015

I have every sympathy with Dr Bourne's views above, and the rather sad picture he paints of Dungeness in 1967 is all too accurate. Regrettably, there is no prospect whatever of a return to the old days. In the nigh-on fifty years since the 1967 article was written a second power station has been built, and as I write the first one is being slowly dismantled. It could be worse; one of the plans was for a third one to be built and on land currently occupied by the observatory. That plan has thankfully gone away for the time being, but the fact remains that the owners of the power station own our land too, so we can never feel totally secure.



In what might seem a rather depressing picture, there are I believe some positives. The whole area of the Dungeness peninsula is watched over by a partnership of conservation bodies. The RSPB reserve alongside our own observatory reserve continues to thrive and carry out important conservation work. My own observatory thrives too, having been set up in 1952, and established as a charitable trust in 1974, thanks to a generous bequest. RNBWS members will be interested to know by the way that there is a naval connection here, for the observatory is housed in the former officer's house of Royal Naval Shore Signal Station No11, built in 1820. Adjoining the house is the row of ratings' cottages (now let to power station employees), and the anchor points and chains for the signal mast can be seen on the knoll outside.

Bird ringing at Dungeness began in 1952, and since then 372 species have been recorded here. In 2000 we celebrated the ringing of a quarter of a million birds. Over the years the work of the Observatory has also spread into a wide range of other fields with considerable interests in insects with moth trapping, butterfly, dragonfly and grasshoppers being much studied, and cetaceans are becoming increasingly common offshore.

On the seabird front there are two sea-watch hides. Both blew away in the great storm of 1987, but were replaced, and the latest change was in 2012 when the hide overlooking the power station outfall (the 'Patch'), was also blown away and again replaced by EDF. Seawatching has been a great success story with many hours of coverage now recorded and a number of species showing some large increases over the years. The same cannot be said of land birds (and here I move onto the bad news) where we have seen a decline in almost all passerines, a highly worrying trend. There are many reasons for these declines, including general national/global changes in populations, changes in weather patterns, and changes in habitat with large areas of suitable cover across the whole peninsula gone compared to the nineteen-fifties and sixties. Climate change is clearly having some effects too, with many southern species moving northwards and colonising this country and migrants arriving earlier and remaining longer in the autumn.

This is by far the most significant change in my time at the observatory, but there are other concerns too. Pylons from the power stations continue to be a hazard to flying birds, and of course the power stations themselves, covering many acres, have meant a loss of bird habitat. I should also add that around a million people a year now come to Dungeness, which is good in some respects, but hardly bird-friendly.

Finally, the Observatory building itself has undergone considerable refurbishment in recent years to try and encourage interested people and parties to stay. It is now very comfortable, and ideal for use as a base for carrying out all sorts of wildlife recording. Why not come and see for yourself?

**David Walker, 2015**

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Plate 20. Brown Skua *Catharacta antarctica*.

## Ringed Brown Skuas in the South Shetland Islands, Antarctica

by Warrant Officer Tony Tindale, *HMS Protector*

(All photographs taken by the author)

After tasking in the Caribbean and off the west coast of Africa during the northern hemisphere summer, *HMS Protector* returned to Antarctica for the austral summer to conduct a further four Work Periods in the ice. During the second of these the ship had a small British Antarctic Survey inspection team embarked, tasked with conducting inspections of Antarctic bases and vessels encountered in and around the Antarctic Peninsula. It was a period in which *Protector* lived up to its name as the Royal Navy's Ice Patrol Ship, ensuring compliance with international regulations.

Brown Skua (*Catharacta Antarctica*) was a species encountered frequently, and during a four day period in the 2015 new year I spotted five metal-ringed Brown Skuas. I was fortunate enough to be able to capture the details of each ring and consequently received the life histories of the five birds after contacting the Hiddensee Bird Ringing Centre in Germany. The Brown Skua is an impressive brute of a bird that doesn't reach maturity for at least five years, and I found that four of the individuals I encountered were at least fourteen years old.

I encountered the first two individuals (EA138446 and EA138449) at Martel Inlet during an inspection of the Brazilian Comandante Ferraz Station on King George Island. I didn't initially notice the metal ring on the right leg of EA138446 as I photographed it perched on the starboard after corner of the quarterdeck first thing in the morning. Fortunately I managed to record all the ring information later in the morning when I saw the bird in front of the bridge, this time accompanied by another ringed Brown Skua. Both birds were very obliging and remained present until the ship departed the area for Half Moon Island after lunch.



**Plate 21.** Brown Skua EA138446, aged 15+ years.



**Plate 22.** Brown Skua EA108294, aged 14+ years.



**Plate 23.** Brown Skua EA110736, aged 14 years.

A couple of days later, on the evening of Sunday 11 January, I came across two more metal-ringed Brown Skuas (EA110738 and EA108294) as the ship entered Maxwell Bay, King George Island, where we were due to do an inspection of the Uruguayan Artigas Station the following day. One of the birds also had a coloured ring (black VPO on white) on its left leg. Both birds remained onboard overnight, (much to the disgust of the Buffer because of the significant amount of poop the birds deposited all over the starboard lifeboat) and I was able to get much better images of them the following day. These two birds were presumably a pair because they chased off any other Skuas that flew near the ship. As with the previous two Brown Skuas it was only after the ship got underway and left Maxwell Bay that they flew off.

After leaving those two birds in the ship's wake in Maxwell Bay I encountered yet another ringed individual (EA181045) off Nelson Island that afternoon, while the ship was conducting an inspection of a small private refuge. This particular Brown Skua had a blue coloured ring (white AE1 on blue) on its right leg in addition to a metal ring on its left. Like the previous four birds it was very confident and obliging as it walked around the quarterdeck in the sunshine.



**Plate 24.** Brown Skua EA138448, aged 15+ years.



**Plate 25.** Brown Skua EA181045, aged 3+ years.

**Table 1.** Life history data of the five metal ringed Brown Skuas (Hiddensee Bird Ringing Centre, LUNG Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, An der Mühle 4, D-17493 Greifswald, Germany). Ringing details are listed on the first row followed by recovery details on the second row. All five birds were spotted in the same area where they had been ringed, 7 km being the furthest distance away.

Ringing and recovery data			Date	Place	Recovery days/ distance (km)
Ring	Sex	Age			
EA138446	F	Adult, breeding bird	20 Nov 04 9 Jan 15	Admiralty Bay, King George Island Martel Inlet, King George Island	3702 / 1 E
EA138449		Adult, breeding bird	22 Nov 04 9 Jan 15	Admiralty Bay, King George Island Martel Inlet, King George Island	3700 / 1 E
EA110738		Not fledged	9 Jan 01 12 Jan 15	Bellingshausen, King George Island Maxwell Bay, King George Island	5116 / 0
EA108294		Unknown but able to fly	3 Jan 01 12 Jan 15	Bellingshausen, King George Island Maxwell Bay, King George Island	5122 / 0
EA181045		Unknown but able to fly	26 Jan 12 12 Jan 15	Bellingshausen, King George Island Edgell Bay, Nelson Island	1082 / 7 SSW

That evening, after a brief informal visit to the Polish Arctowski Station back on King George Island, *HMS Protector* left the South Shetland Islands and began her passage north across Drake Passage to Punta Arenas. During Work Period 2 the ship had conducted a total of twenty-eight inspections, of land stations, cruise ships, trawlers, yachts and one private refuge. It included the first ever inspection of a fishing vessel (a krill trawler) by the Royal Navy in Antarctica.

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Plate 26. Grey Ternlet.

## Birds of Lord Howe Island

by Tim and Jane Barton

*Time Barton is a retired Commodore RN and former CO of HMS Endurance. His doctor wife Jane is the photographer*

Lord Howe Island (LHI), which lies directly 370 miles east of Port Macquarie north of Sydney, New South Wales was discovered in 1788 by Lieutenant Lidgbird-Ball, CO of *HMS Supply*, and named after Lord Howe, First Lord of the Admiralty at the time. It was established as a provisioning port for whalers and was permanently settled in 1834.

With the decline of the whaling industry, the export of the Kentia Palm became the island's main activity, but tourism became important from 1932 onwards and with the arrival of flying boats after the second world war visits became more frequent. In a very farsighted decision the islanders resolved to limit the size of the population to 350 permanent residents, and 400 visitors at any one time.

The story of Lord Howe Island is one of visitors welcome and visitors unwelcome. Many of us perhaps have only ever heard of the island because of the story of *HMS Nottingham* hitting the Wolf Rock in 2002 and spending 7 weeks being made safe to come home on a low loader. She was actually the second Royal Navy vessel to founder there and legend has it that the third time it happens the rock will belong to the Royal Navy.

When the island was first discovered there were fifteen species of land birds there, but nine of these are now extinct. Whalers coming to replenish with fresh food, vegetables and water helped themselves to large numbers of birds, both flighted and flightless. The White Gallinule and the White-throated Pigeon disappeared altogether while the Red-headed Parakeet became a pest to planted crops and was exterminated. The flightless Lord Howe Island Woodhen came within a whisker of disappearance but was saved by the removal of cats, goats and pigs and the introduction of a careful breeding and release programme.

Man was also responsible for the introduction of rats when the steamship *Makambo* ran aground on the island in 1918. Rats largely accounted for the extinction of five further species, and only the LHI White Eye, the LHI Currawong, the LHI Golden Whistler, the Emerald Ground Dove and the Sacred Kingfisher survived.

Over the same period 12 species of birds have found their way to this tiny remote volcanic dot in the south Pacific, and decided to stay. They include the Purple Gallinule, the Welcome Swallow, the European Starling, the Nankeen Kestrel, and the Buff-banded Rail. More recently birds such as the Masked Plover and the White-faced Heron have arrived, possibly due to the clearing of native bush for farming, cultivation and grazing, providing a suitable habitat.

Deliberately introduced to the island to control insect species, perhaps because of the demise of the flightless birds, were blackbirds and thrushes from New Zealand. Masked and Barn Owls, initially imported to control rodents, came to prefer a more varied diet and soon displaced the now extinct native Boobook Owl.

To return to the saga of rats and their devastating effect on the native wild life, a long standing baiting programme has recently been deemed to be unsuccessful and a large if not obscene sum of money with a time constraint attached has been pledged by New South Wales. This is to fund a frightening eradication program using a compound released from helicopters onto not only the offenders but also onto the unsuspecting animal and marine life, and indirectly the humans on the island. This has presented concerned islanders with a terrible dilemma. Removal of rats would be desirable, but at what cost? This method has apparently been used in other remote parts of the world, with varying degrees of success, but never on an inhabited paradise island, and when the primary source of income in this day and age is eco tourism, one can see the signs of a disaster in the making. The long term unpredictable consequences of pesticides in a protected ecosystem and the risks to human health have to be balanced against the potential success of ridding the island of rats.



**Plate 27.** Sacred Kingfisher.



**Plate 28.** Whimbrel.



**Plate 29.** White-faced Heron.



The story of the seabirds of the islands is in some ways a happier one. Fourteen species breed on or near the island in huge numbers. Flesh-footed and Sooty Shearwaters, called Mutton Birds locally, breed in burrows on the island in large numbers and fly out to sea at dawn to fish for their young, tucked away in their burrows. They seem largely unaffected by the rats.

One seabird breeds only on Lord Howe Island, and that is the Providence Petrel. Black Noddies have established themselves on the island, following the introduction of the Norfolk Pine, their preferred habitat. Enormous numbers of Sooty Terns, Brown Noddies, Black-winged Petrels, Red-tailed Tropicbirds, Grey Ternlets and Masked Boobies breed locally. The White Tern insists on hatching and rearing a single chick on branches and stumps within the so-called Central Business District of the island (three shops and a Post Office), showing no fear of people and in fact seeming to rely on passers-by to put the chicks back up again when they fall to the ground.



**Plate 30.** Lord Howe Island Woodhen.



**Plate 31.** Buff-banded Rail.



**Plate 32.** Pacific Golden Plover.



**Plate 33.** Bar-tailed Godwit.



**Plate 34.** Red-tailed Tropicbird.



**Plate 35.** Sooty Tern.



**Plate 36.** Masked Booby.



**Plate 37.** White Tern and chick.

There are a number of regular visitors to the Island and these include Bar-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel, Ruddy Turnstone and Pacific Golden Plover.

Sadly the seabirds of the area face a major threat, that of plastic floating in the sea. Adult birds cannot distinguish between brightly coloured bits of plastic and fish; they swallow them and feed them to their young with dire results. Unfortunately the northern Pacific region has become awash with plastic, a dustbin for the densely populated countries of this area.

Notwithstanding all these difficulties Lord Howe Island became a World Heritage Island in 1982 in recognition of the island's beauty and biodiversity, and it is a paradise for birdwatchers.

We were lucky enough to visit in February this year and were completely enchanted by the island, the people, and their enthusiasm for their wild life. We wish them well in the future with their mission to preserve this idyllic spot in the South Pacific.

**Tim and Jane Barton**  
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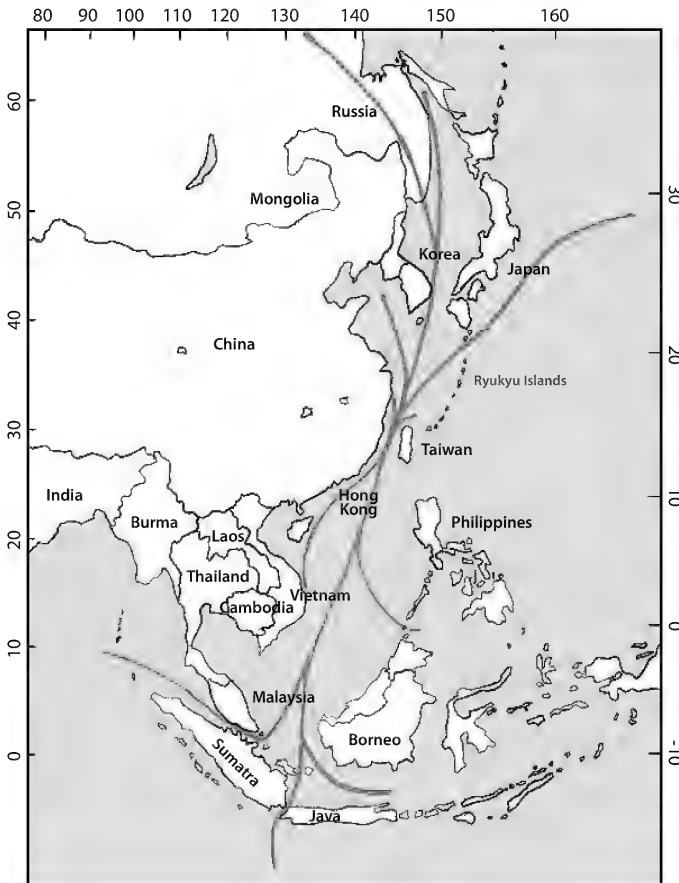
# Observations on seabird migration, Po Toi Island, Hong Kong, 2006–2013

by Geoff Welch, RNBWS Hong Kong rep

## Introduction

Hong Kong (22.3 deg N, 114.2 deg E) lies on the north coast of the South China Sea, an area which is relatively poor for breeding seabirds. With the exception of three species of tern, there are no major seabird colonies; the closest are on islands off the coast of East China and Taiwan several hundred miles to the north east of Hong Kong.

However, the South China Sea is a major migration route for seabirds coming from wintering areas to the south of Hong Kong to their breeding areas further north in spring and in the reverse direction in autumn (Figure 1).



Po Toi Island is the most southerly point of Hong Kong and is recognized as the best land-based location in Hong Kong for observing the migration of seabirds. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to take part in a study of bird migration, both land birds and seabirds, on Po Toi over an eight year period from 2006 to 2013. Although the study was mostly concerned with land bird migration, a total of 1,191 hours was spent watching for seabirds. Almost all sessions were from 7am to 9am in the early morning and from 4pm to 6pm in the evening, the peak hours for seabird passage.

**Figure 1.** Seabird migration routes in the South China Sea

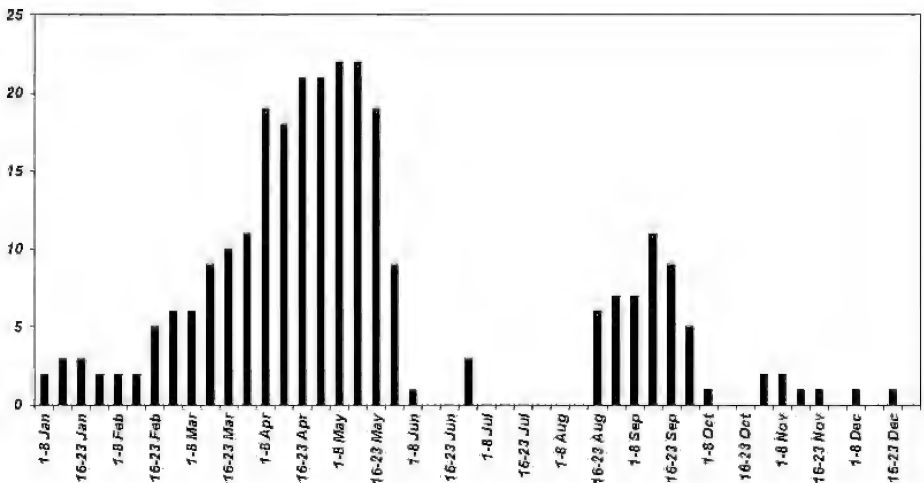


**Plate 38.** Aleutian Terns - spring and autumn migrants, although much more common in spring. Called 'Pollution Tern' in Hong Kong because of its habit of resting on floating waste. © P & M Wong

### Seasonal variations in numbers of seabirds

**Figure 2** shows the number of seabird species seen in each week of the year over the period 2006 to 2013 (locally breeding terns are not included in this chart).

The peak months were late February to May for spring passage and late August to the end of September for autumn passage. Passage in spring is much heavier than in autumn, as Figure 2 shows - over 90% of all seabird numbers occurred in the period from the third week in February to the end of May.



**Figure 2.** Number of seabird species by week

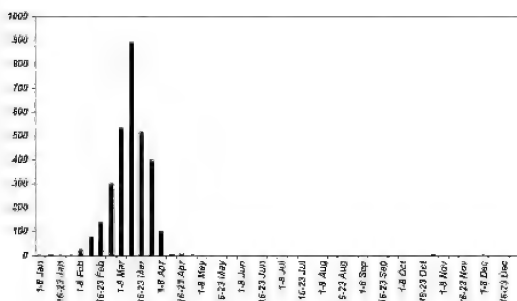


Figure 3. Heuglin's Gull

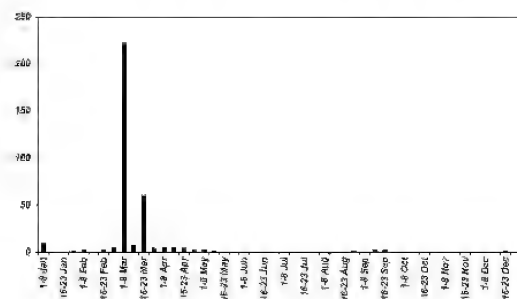


Figure 4. Black-tailed Gull

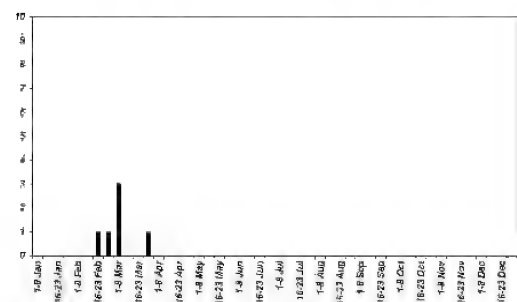


Figure 5. Black-legged Kittiwake

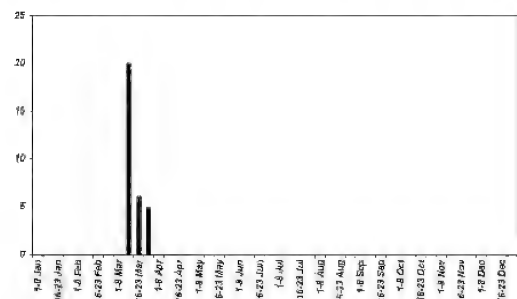


Figure 6. Red-breasted Merganser

This is primarily due to the location of Hong Kong relative to a seabird's migration route through the South China Sea - see Figure 1. Seabirds are migrating northwards in spring from wintering areas to the south and west of Hong Kong, and in the reverse direction in autumn. For those birds migrating directly across the South China Sea, a small deviation to the west in spring, possibly caused by easterly winds, will mean they pass through Hong Kong. In autumn they are likely to bypass Hong Kong on the direct route unless a typhoon blows them westward or they use a coastal route around south China.

Because of this predominance of spring versus autumn migration, the discussion below focuses mainly on the spring migration period

### Early spring species - late February to end March

The first signs of migration usually appear in the third week of February and the species involved are those that winter in the Hong Kong area and to the west of Hong Kong: gulls, sea duck and murrelet with the occasional loon or cormorant.

Heuglin's Gull *Larus fuscus* (Figure 3) was the commonest seabird migrant species in early spring. Other similar large gull species regularly seen in the Hong Kong area - Caspian *L. cachinnans*, Vega *L. vegae* and Slaty-backed Gull *L. schistisagus* - probably form part of the total, but large gulls did not often come close enough for separation, and the overwhelming majority will have been Heuglin's. This species migrated in flocks of up to 50 and was seen more commonly in the evening than in the early morning by a factor of approximately 2:1. Adult birds were more common in late March.

Black-tailed Gulls *L. crassirostris* (Figure 4) were less consistent in their annual numbers than Heuglin's Gull. In some years they were fairly common, in others quite scarce. Most birds seen were in immature plumage.

Single Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* (Figure 5), both adult and juvenile, were seen in most years and are probably annual in Hong Kong waters.

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator* (Figure 6) were annual on passage in small numbers. They occurred in small flocks of two to six birds, mixed adult males and female/juveniles.

Passage of Ancient Murrelet *Synthliboramphus antiquus* (Figure 7), in singles or small flocks, started in late February and extended into April and early May, although the peak numbers occurred in March.

### April to mid-May

This second passage period focused mainly on those species which winter in the equatorial area to the south of Hong Kong, terns, jaegers and phalaropes, with most species showing a peak in numbers towards the end of April. More birds were seen in the early morning than the late evening with terns in particular being early morning migrants.

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* (Figure 8) had an extensive migration period, from mid-March to mid-May and some were to be seen on almost every day. Passage was sometimes quite heavy with a peak number of 2,490 in two hours on 5 April 2012, although between 100 and 300 was a more typical number in a single session.

Greater Crested Tern *Thalasseus bergii* (Figure 9) was the first of the tern species to appear in numbers and they

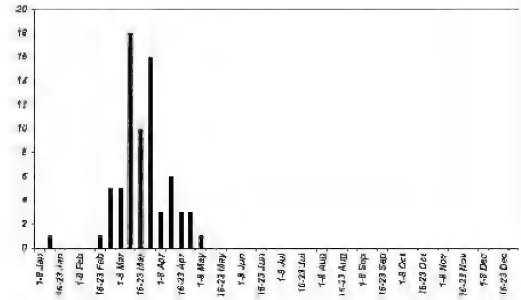


Figure 7. Ancient Murrelet

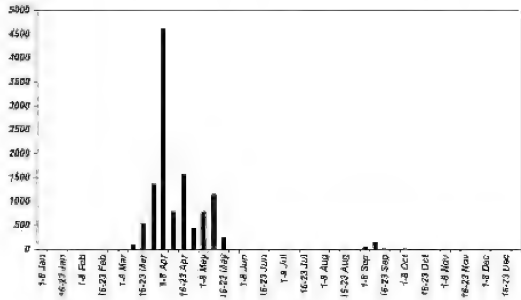


Figure 8. Red-necked Phalarope

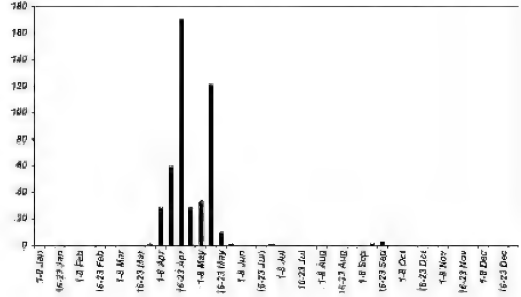


Figure 9. Greater Crested Tern

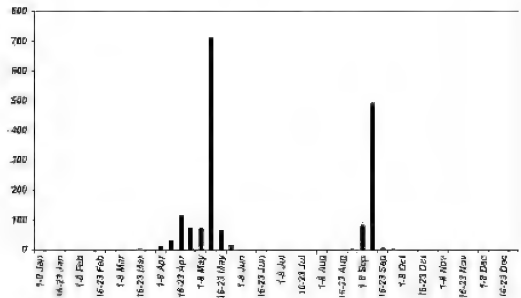


Figure 10. Aleutian Tern

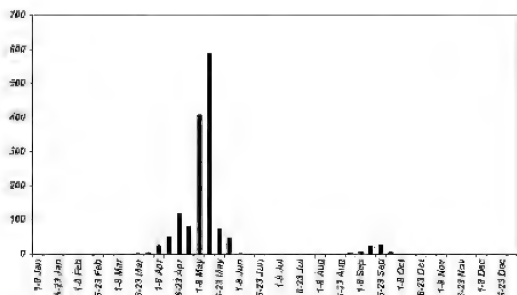


Figure 11. Common Tern

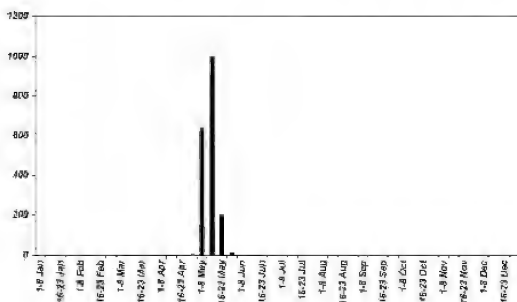


Figure 12. White-winged Tern

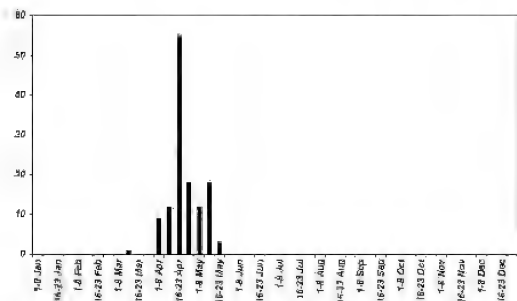


Figure 13. Total Jaeger sp.

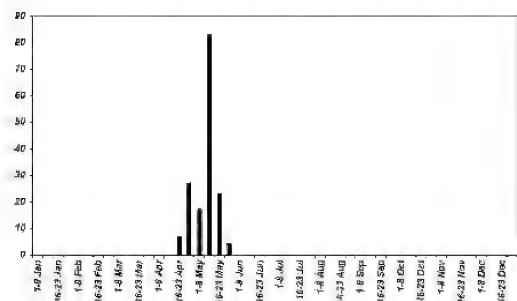


Figure 14. Short-tailed Shearwater

were seen almost daily from early April onwards.

Aleutian *Onychoprion aleuticus* (Figure 10) and Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* (Figure 11) were frequently seen together in spring, occasionally in large flocks. Hong Kong is one of the few places away from their breeding grounds where Aleutian Terns can be seen annually.

White-winged Tern (Figure 12) was a much later spring migrant than other terns, with passage focused in May, often in large flocks of several hundred following periods of stormy weather.

The passage periods of the three Jaeger species seen regularly in Hong Kong, Pomarine *Stercorarius pomarinus*, Parasitic *S. parasiticus* and Long-tailed Jaeger *S. longicaudus*, were similar and followed the pattern of the terns on which they prey (Figure 13). Most were in singles or pairs although Long-tailed Jaegers were occasionally seen in small flocks of ten or more.

Short-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus tenuirostris* (Figure 14) is a long distance passage migrant between its breeding grounds in southern Australia and its wintering grounds in the Sea of Japan and further north. Its passage through Hong Kong waters in spring was only discovered in 2006 but it has been recorded annually in small numbers since then, with a focused passage period from the last week in April to the end of May, usually peaking in the second week in May. Recent geolocator studies of Short-tailed Shearwater migration (Carey 2014) have shown these dates are consistent with the main northerly post-breeding migration of this species through the western Pacific Ocean.



Streaked Shearwater *Calonectris leucomelas* (Figure 15) is a northeast Asia breeding species and is probably present in the South China Sea throughout the winter. It was seen off Po Toi on various dates between March and May, usually in easterly winds. A peak count of 80 was present in waters off Po Toi following the passage of Typhoon Chanchu on 17 May 2006.

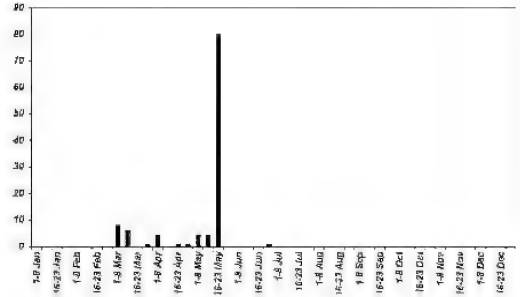


Figure 15. Streaked Shearwater

Juvenile Lesser Frigatebirds *Fregata ariel* (Figure 16) were seen annually in Po Toi waters in spring. Exactly where these come from is not known but they are probably first-year dispersals from islands to the south rather than migrants as such. They occurred on various dates between late March and June although most records were in early May.

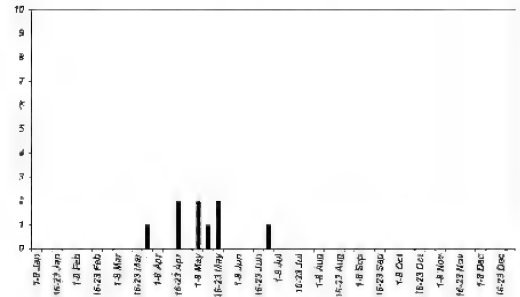


Figure 16. Lesser Frigatebird



Plate 39. Great Crested Tern - seen almost daily migrating past. © P & M Wong



**Plate 40.** Ancient Murrelet - an annual spring migrant off Po Toi. © P & M Wong



**Plate 41.** Three Heuglin's Gulls (adult, first spring and second spring) and a Black-tailed Gull. © G Welch



**Plate 42.** Long-tailed Skuas - the most common skuas seen from Po Toi. © P & M Wong



**Plate 43.** Short-tailed Shearwater - recently discovered migrant. © P & M Wong



**Plate 44.** Streaked Shearwater - an occasional spring visitor to Po Toi. © P & M Wong

### **Autumn species - mid August to end September**

Only Aleutian Tern (Figure 10) were seen annually on autumn migration, and in very small numbers except for a single passage of 430 on 9 September 2010 following the passing of a tropical storm through the Taiwan Strait. Red-necked Phalarope (Figure 8) and Common Tern (Figure 11) were occasional autumn migrants but only in very small numbers.

### **Effect of Weather and other conditions**

Weather was generally less significant in the migration pattern of seabirds seen from Po Toi than for land birds. However, certain weather effects were noticeable

Strong easterly winds and typhoons brought more species and numbers, especially terns, jaegers and shearwaters, into the Hong Kong area. These were then seen passing Po Toi on the days immediately afterwards.

Mist, making land less visible, would sometimes result in birds migrating closer off-shore from Po Toi and thus more easily identifiable, provided it was not too thick to impair visibility.

### **Conclusions**

Seabird watching is the last frontier for bird watchers in Hong Kong. Most now use the seabird cruises organized by the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society and others. However, these tend to give a snapshot picture of seabird migration. For a more representative record, it is necessary to spend time seabird watching on a consistent daily basis over a number of years. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to do this, and the results given above can generally be considered an accurate representation of seabird migration through Hong Kong and the northern part of the South China Sea in any normal year.

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Plate 45. *Lord Nelson* off The Horn © M Dobrowolski

# Seabirds on a Pacific voyage under sail

by Captain Stephen Chapman MN

(All photographs, except Plates 45 & 49, taken by the author)

## Introduction

Having crossed the North Atlantic many times on slow ships both under steam in the 1960s and more recently under sail (Chapman, 2013) the opportunity to cross the South Pacific entirely under sail on the barque *Lord Nelson* was one I could not pass up. For a birder the great advantage of tall ship sailing is that it provides an ideal platform for observing seabirds. When the weather permits a lookout on the bow just 4–5 metres above the sea gives an unobstructed view of the horizon at a theoretical distance of 3–4 miles. In force four or five winds a sailing speed of six knots may be achieved which is good for viewing. In calmer conditions, less wind provides an opportunity to get onto the bowsprit and to get closer to crossing birds or birds on the water. This note summarises the seabirds encountered on a crossing of the South Pacific Ocean from Auckland, New Zealand to Ushuaia, Argentina. By most standards it was a very long voyage departing from Napier on 26 December 2013 to the Chatham Islands on 29–30 December rounding the Horn on the night of 1 February and berthing at Ushuaia on 9 February 2014.

The port-to-port passage was 39 days at an average speed of 6.02 knots, and during that time we did not see another vessel. Since the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914 no commercial trade uses the southern route to cross the Pacific. Hence RNBWS has very few open ocean observations from the higher latitudes in these waters. Occasional night time sightings of high flying aircraft were the only sign of other life. It did provide an opportunity to grapple with the challenge so well summarised in Olney and Scofield, 2007: *almost every wandering-type albatross you will see will have a different plumage... it is almost impossible to assign an individual bird to a species.* That was a challenge I faced daily, when even with multiple digital images I realised that separating Wandering Albatross *Diomedea exulans* from Southern Royal *Diomedea epomophora* was not straightforward or always possible.

### Sailing strategy

The shortest track for an ocean passage is of course to follow a great circle route, but in the southern oceans this would have taken us too far south, to 65°S latitude, and into bad weather, high winds and rough seas, putting the ship at risk from ice which breaks away in the summer months and drifts northward. Instead, *Lord Nelson's* passage plan was to follow the Great Southern Route used by 19th century trading vessels, taking advantage of the strong westerly winds while staying to the north of the deepest depressions, to arrive at a way-point off Cape Horn at 56°S 63°W. That was the theory. In practice it was modified, to the north or to the south, to take best advantage of the wind and avoid the worst of advancing depressions. From the Chatham Islands there is no land across the Pacific in between unless one makes a huge deviation north to Pitcairn and Polynesia, well inside the tropics, in which latitudes the winds are contrary.

Progress varied, some days achieving 160–170 miles, others less than 100. We entered the Southern Ocean at the 50th parallel on Burn's night with 1,000 miles left to run to the Horn. In practice adopting this conservative passage plan saw us sailing on the 45th parallel until 100°W and thence bearing away to the south. Contrary winds towards South America however took us heading in a north easterly direction at times - as always with a sailing vessel the wind patterns dictate how one progresses, and on this particular passage one of the aims was to complete the ocean crossing under sail and not use the engines.



Plate 46. Southern Royal Albatross.

## Atlantic and Pacific voyages compared

Whilst they are very different oceans it is useful to make some comparisons between the North Atlantic and South Pacific. Crossing the Atlantic under sail from Bermuda to the Azores on board *Tenacious* took 14 days in summer. Crossing the Pacific from Chatham Island to the Horn took 33 days also in summer. In the Atlantic the prevailing winds are westerly but can come from any quarter for long periods. *Tenacious* had easterly winds in the Atlantic. When there were no birds to see, one could count jelly fish, or pieces of flotsam in the shape of plastic and other debris, or enjoy sightings of cetaceans, and occasional encounters with other shipping.

On the 4,783 mile passage to the Horn we did not see a single ship in all this time, but there was not a single day (except one with fog) when albatrosses or other birds were not recorded. Our diligent lookouts - one to port and one to starboard - encountered no more than a handful of whale or dolphin sightings. In the Pacific on the occasions when there were no albatrosses, petrels or shearwaters to watch there was nothing to see: rare sightings of cetaceans were key events; no flotsam; and no shipping.

The Horn, the southernmost headland of the Tierra del Fuego archipelago of southern Chile, sees an average wind speed of force 5 with gusts to force 10 at any season and 2,000mm of annual rainfall. As an exception to the rule, and contrary to the information on the Admiralty seasonal routing chart, the evening when we sighted the land west of the Horn standing against a back-drop of dramatic clouds, all was still. Further to the north was a jagged line of snow white mountains. Almost drifting, we reached the way point in the Drake Passage south of the Horn at 23.48 on 1 February. Here we encountered more birds than at any other time.



Plate 47. Salvin's Albatross.



Plate 48. Northern Royal Albatross.

## Highlights of seabird records

Even close to the shores of New Zealand ocean birds were very much in evidence, with sightings of Wandering *Diomedea exulans*, Grey-headed *Thalassarche chrysostoma*, and Buller's Albatross *Thalassarche bulleri*, while Westland's Petrel *Procellaria westlandica* was noted on the run from Auckland across the Bay of Plenty to Napier<sup>1</sup>. Also small *cookilaria* petrels which taxed my brain for days to come. Fully stored and provisioned we sailed from Napier on Boxing Day for Waitangi Harbour of Chatham Island<sup>2</sup>.

Barely a day passed during which sightings of Wandering Albatross were not reported; they were the most widespread species of seabird in distribution. Most by far were immature birds. Singletons were most commonly sighted. The exception to this rule was in calm conditions such as on 15 January when a group of 5 birds was seen on the sea [45°S, 121°W]. One approached very close as the ship lay motionless (see Plate 50 overleaf). Royal Albatrosses were seen from 172–164°W; 128–121°W; and from 101°W to the Horn, but never in more than ones or twos, and equal sightings of Northern and Southern. On a grey 1 January an albatross showing the characteristics of Amsterdam Albatross appeared for a few minutes and shortly afterwards one which from the dark cutting edge to upper mandible, humped back and white tail feathers, was clearly a Northern Royal. I saw only one Light-mantled (Sooty) Albatross *Phoebastria palpebrata* which came close astern at 124°W for a few minutes on 14 January. Another was reported in the Southern Ocean at 87°W on the 27th. Both large albatrosses were less in evidence once we passed the Horn. That said the best views of a Southern Royal *Diomedea epomophora* were after passing the Horn in the Le Maire Strait (Plate 46). A single Salvin's Albatross *Thalassarche salvini* was seen on the run from Auckland to Napier (Plate 47) and also at birds 101–100°W on 22nd and 23rd January. With the exception of a couple of sightings east of the Chatham Islands, Black-browed *Thalassarche melanophris* appeared only towards the eastern part of the Southern Ocean from 91°W with rafts of about 30 south of the Horn and up to 100 in the Atlantic at 65°W. Having seen preparations on Chatham Island for the translocation of Chatham Albatross *Thalassarche (c.) eremita* chicks from the Pyramid rock to Chatham Island, I was keen to find the birds at sea. The light was fading and sky covered in low cloud when we passed Pyramid which was just visible about 6 miles to the north. The first sighting was of an adult that approached before shearing away. In flat light the back and wings were very dark; head and neck all dark grey. The bill was yellow with an area of blackish at the lower tip. Two more positive sightings were made in the following 20 minutes and finally in fading light a distant uncertain bird was noted. Buller's Albatross (Plate 49) was only recorded off New Zealand and in the seas between Napier and Chatham Island and showed itself to be a habitual ship follower.

On the occasional days when albatrosses were not seen there were still sightings of petrels and shearwaters, prions and storm-petrels to enjoy. Those positively identified included: Southern and Northern Giant Petrel *Macronectes giganteus* and *Macronectes halli*, Cape Petrel (Cape Pigeon) *Daption capense*, prions *Pachyptila sp.*, Great-winged Petrel *Pterodroma macroptera*, Grey-faced Petrel *Pterodroma gouldi*, Black-winged Petrel *Pterodroma nigripennis*, White-headed Petrel *Pterodroma lessonii*, Magenta Petrel *Pterodroma magentae* (only on Chatham Island (Chapman, 2013)), Grey Petrel *Procellaria cinerea*, White-chinned Petrel, *Procellaria aequinoctialis*, Westland Petrel *Procellaria westlandica*, and Sooty Shearwater *Ardenna grisea*. Habitual ship follower Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus* joined us first at 54°S 83°W. White-faced Storm-petrel *Pelagodroma marina* were much in evidence around the Chatham



**Plate 49.** Buller's Albtross © *M Dobrowolski*



**Plate 50.** Wandering Albatross.



Islands and thereafter provided occasional sightings; also seen were Grey-backed Storm-petrel *Garrodia nereis*, and an uncertain Black-bellied Storm-petrel *Fregetta tropica*. The most surprising sighting was a tight group of 8 small waders that took off from the sea at 45°S 115°W on 17 January. Noted as having a wing bar and contrasting markings on the upper parts I was fairly sure these were Red-necked Phalarope, a bird I am familiar with in other seas, but was surprised to find here.

## Reflection

Analysing my collection of photographic images of large albatrosses was one way to confirm the identity of some of the birds. Using this as a base, and taking the days on which there were photographs gives the following result. Wanderers were so noted on 34% of passage days whilst Northern and Southern Royals were each noted on 11% of days. This suggests that Wanderers were more numerous. No attempt was made to census birds. Usually birds that approached or passed by were in ones or twos. The largest number seen together was when the weather was calm on the evening of 15 January when a group of five Wanderers was seen on the sea close to the ship. Taking account of sightings in addition to photos there were only 8 days (20%) on which none of the large albatrosses were seen.

Passing the Horn under sail was a milestone for sure. The strategy adopted, to keep to the north of advancing weather systems and take favourable winds as these passed to the south, served us well. We did not make record breaking daily runs but we did pick up the back wash of storms with less fierce winds and long rolling swells giving violent rolling and sleepless nights even with the damping effect from our canvas aloft. We also enjoyed windless areas of high pressure, 1028 hPa, on more than one occasion. At 120°W we waited in a sea of glass for wind as did the Wandering Albatrosses, one of which swam over to within 15 meters to check us out, and posed for the photographers on board. There were rainbows with the showers and one night a lunar bow from the light of a near full moon.

The words of Olney and Scofield (loc. cit.) proved to be so true: *almost every wandering-type albatross you will see will have a different plumage*. That added to the identification challenge.

Finally, one should say that this was an exceptional voyage by any standard: to sail for 39 days, experience the very rapid weather changes and huge swells of the Southern Ocean close at hand and to see many albatrosses, petrels and shearwaters.

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<sup>1</sup> Numbers, dates and position are shown in the Notes on seabird reports received, *Sea Swallow* 63, page 70.

<sup>2</sup> For a full report on the voyage see *Sea Breezes*, May 2014, p38–42.



**Plate 51.** Razorbills off the Kitsissut colony, Greenland. © *K Falk*

## Seabirds at Kitsissut Avalliit in Southwest Greenland

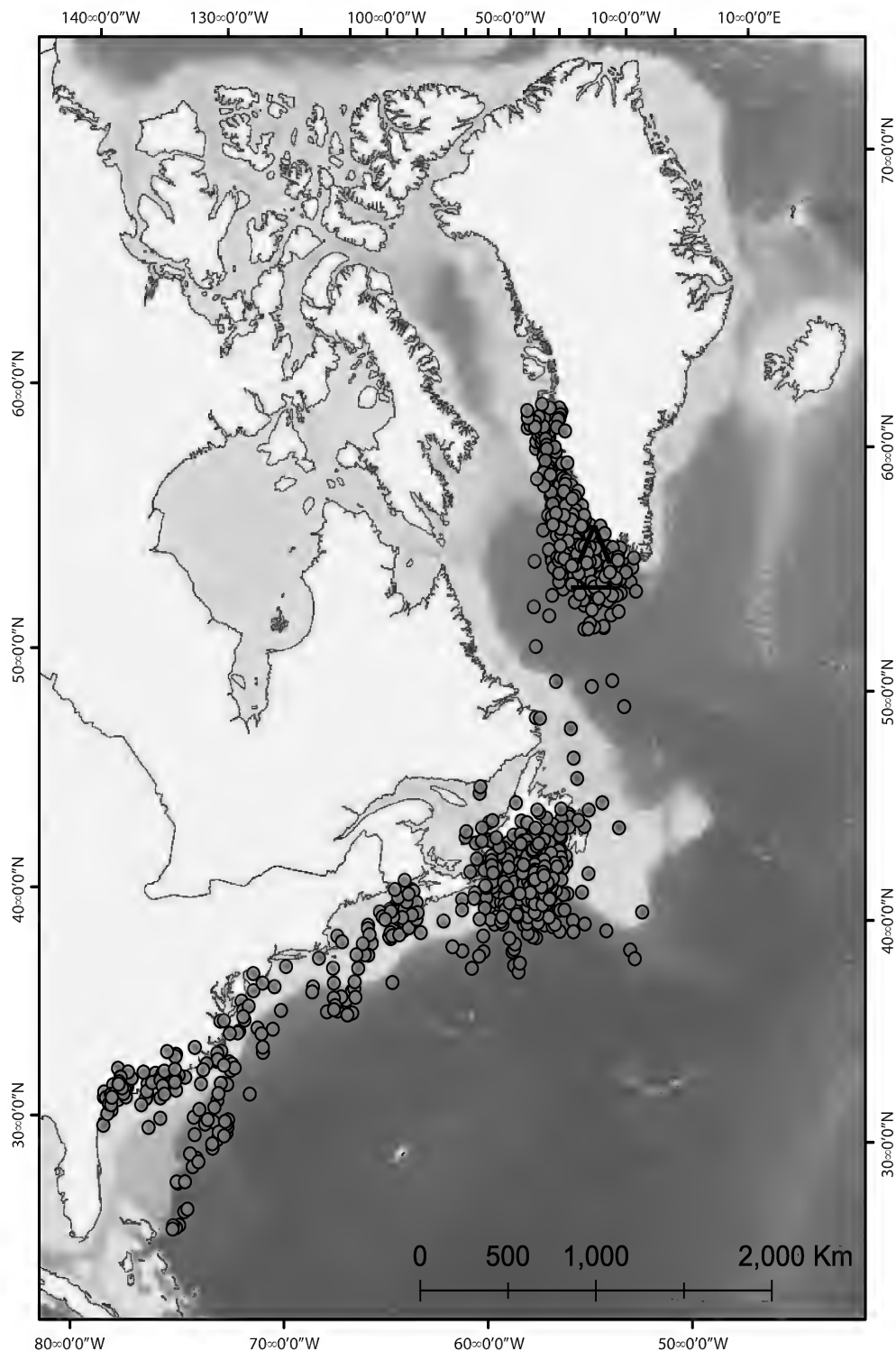
by Dr Jannie Linnebjerg,  
Post Doctorate Fellow at Lund University, Sweden

Kitsissut Avalliit (60°46' N, 48°28'W) is a small archipelago consisting of about 50 small islands and skerries, situated approximately 15 km off the coast of southwest Greenland. The area is known for its harsh weather conditions with frequent storms and long periods of fog, rain and snow, but even though the islands have the weather against them, they have the highest diversity of breeding seabirds in Greenland, including Brünnich's, Common, and Black Guillemots, Razorbills, and Atlantic Puffins.

Kitsissut Avalliit was discovered as a seabird breeding site by Finn Solomon, in 1971. There were then four visits by Kaj Kampp and Knud Falk, in 1983, 1985, 1992 and 1999, and in 1998 the area was designated as a breeding reserve, though there was still very little detailed knowledge of the breeding seabirds in this area.

During the three summers of 2009–11 I had the opportunity to go to Kitsissut Avalliit to conduct fieldwork for my PhD. My work broadly concerned the foraging ecology of Brünnich's Guillemots, Common Guillemots and Razorbills, with a focus on identifying important foraging areas, migration routes and wintering areas. Also included in the study were the birds' diet, foraging behaviour, breeding success and annual survival.

**Figure 1 (opposite).** Migration and overwintering sites of three individual razorbills during the non-breeding season 2010–11, based on gls data. The breeding colony is marked with a star. One bird spent the entire non-breeding season just south of Newfoundland. The two other birds migrated all the way to Florida.





**Plate 52.** The author weighing chicks 50M down a cliff face at Kippaku (another Greenland seabird colony). © A Lage Labansen

I quickly found that it was quite difficult to track seabirds over large areas of open water, and acquiring knowledge about their whereabouts during the non-breeding season was very challenging. Fortunately we now have technology on our side and tiny light level loggers (geolocators) have been developed to do just that. The only problem with these types of loggers is that you have to recapture the birds in order to get the data, and one might think that catching a few birds should not be that difficult, but it is - especially when the birds lose their egg or decide to skip a breeding season (long-lived seabirds are known to do this when food conditions are poor). This means spending many hours hunting down birds and trying to sneak up on them.

Luckily the razorbills at Kitsissut Avalliit were fairly cooperative, and thus the easiest to study. The razorbill is endemic to the North Atlantic; in the Nearctic it breeds from New England via the Labrador coast to western Greenland and is the least abundant auk in this area. Although this bird is reasonably well studied in Europe and Canada, hardly any information exists on overwintering areas of razorbills in Greenland. The little information we had was from ringing recoveries and suggested that part of the Greenlandic razorbill population overwintered off Newfoundland.

My study did indeed confirm this, but I also found that many razorbills migrated much further south than expected and wintered in the same areas as birds from Atlantic Canada, perhaps indicating relatively recent colonization of Greenland. In fact, only one of my birds stayed off the coast of Newfoundland for the entire non-breeding period. Most others had just a stopover in Newfoundland before continuing to Nova Scotia and the Gulf of Maine, whilst three individuals continued further south along the US east coast as far south as 26°N.

The individuals with the most southerly overwintering area slowly headed back towards the breeding colony at the end of March, whereas all other individuals left their overwintering areas in late April. All birds were back at the breeding colony in May. The migration pattern is interesting in view of the unprecedented appearance of several razorbills in Florida in December 2012.

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Plate 53. Spectacular granite outcrops, La Vigue.

## ***HMS Echo* and the Seychelles - unfinished business**

by Lieutenant Philip Boak RN

(All photographs taken by the author)

The year 2014 saw *HMS Echo* engaged in wide variety of tasks, taking her halfway across the globe. As a survey vessel, optimised for work on the continental shelf, *Echo* naturally spends much of her time engaged in survey operations, more specifically in what is known in the jargon as Military Data Gathering (MDG). It was on a break from such tasks that *Echo* called into the Seychelles in January. Due to lack of preparedness, I only managed to sight a blue pigeon, one of twelve endemic land birds on the inner islands.

Following this trip, *HMS Echo* continued her military survey business, and a second visit to the Seychelles was programmed for March. This time I was armed with appropriate references (Skerrett & Disley 2011), and a ruthless plan to ensure all twelve endemics were sighted. However, no-one could have foreseen the tragedy of the loss of Malaysian Airlines flight MH370, and at the last moment *Echo* was diverted eastwards across the Indian Ocean to assist in the multinational search. The initial plan was to utilise the ship's survey equipment to listen for the black-box transponder of the aircraft. However, the limited battery life of the transponder, depth of water, and vast nature of the search area meant that no definite fix could be made. Priority then turned to a surface search and our task was to assist the Australian vessel *Ocean Shield*, through the provision of oceanographic data. Unfortunately, the search yielded nothing conclusive, and *Echo* called into Freemantle before slowly making her way back round the globe, arriving in the UK in late 2014.

## The mission

It was against this background that I resolved to travel back to the Seychelles to sight all 12 endemic bird species. The main caveat was that I would limit my search to the birds of the inner granitic islands, and not include the additional species found on Aldabra. An opportunity arose during a week of leave in May 15, and my parents and brother became unwitting accomplices to the mission, lured by the prospect of a relaxing beach holiday. Instead, they found themselves plagued by mosquitos and other hardships during the search for the birds.

## Mahé. Days 1 and 2

The trip to the Seychelles naturally started on the largest of the inner islands, Mahé. This island is home to the capital, Victoria, and the international airport. In terms of biodiversity, the north of the island is dominated by the Morne Seychellois National Park, a mountainous area of forest, and home to seven of the twelve endemic birds.

Under the guidance of a local ornithologist, Perley Constance, a trip was made up the roads of the National Park. A short distance in, a 'bird oasis' yielded sights of the Seychelles Blue Pigeon, Seychelles Kestrel, Seychelles Swiftlet and Seychelles Sunbird. The kestrel and swiftlet were notable for their small size, exhibiting the effects of island dwarfism. Meanwhile, the endemic Fruit Bats, a local culinary delicacy, performed their acrobatics on the surrounding trees.

Further into the National Park a deserted dwelling offered a close-up view of the Seychelles White-eye. This small warbler-type bird is currently listed as endangered, with a population of some 350–450 individuals. To locate this elusive bird, tape recordings were used to attract our individual.



Plate 54. Seychelles Bulbul.



Plate 55. Fairy Tern chick.



Plate 56. Paradise Flycatcher.

The journey into the National Park continued, and night had begun to fall when we reached Venn's Town, also known as The Mission. This site, high up the Sans Souci Road, was once home to a school for the children of liberated slaves. Now the area is home to the elusive Seychelles Scops Owl, found only in the National Park, where it nests in trees and feeds on frogs, cockroaches and other invertebrates. The park supports some 125–142 owl territories, and to sight the bird pre-recorded calls of the owl's distinctive croaking and rasping call were played. After a few minutes, an echo was heard, indicating the presence of an actual owl, and eventually, the owl was located on a nearby branch. Of course, such luring must only be carried out by licensed personnel, to avoid stress on the owls.

### **Praslin and Cousin. Days 3 and 4.**

The nearby island of Praslin was reached after a one-hour ferry journey. The second largest of the granitics, the island is famous for being the location of the World Heritage site of the Vallée de Mai. This 20-hectare site is home to several thousand of the Coco de Mer Palm, famous for its uniquely-shaped nut and dioecious nature. More importantly for me, the Vallée de Mai is also home to the Seychelles Black Parrot. A guided walk through the park identified the famous palms, several of which were undergoing pollination by slugs and geckos. Eventually, towards late afternoon, we came upon several of the parrots, feeding and excavating a potential nest site in a dead tree. The ubiquitous Seychelles Bulbul was also present in great numbers.

Next on the itinerary was the 27-hectare Cousin Island, reached after a short boat ride from Praslin. The island had once been cleared to form a coconut monoculture, but has since been restored to form a sanctuary for nesting seabirds and three of the rarer



**Plate 57.** Seychelles Magpie.



**Plate 58.** The author and Perley Constance.



**Plate 59.** Seychelles Fruit Bat.

Seychelles birds; the Magpie Robin, Fody and Warbler. All of these birds are very tame and happy to approach visiting tourists. Other birds seen at close quarters included nesting Fairy Terns, White-tailed Tropic Birds, and Noddies. The downside was the swarms of mosquitos and tourists, attracted by the tame birds.

### **Days 5 and 6 La Digue**

From Praslin, a 15-minute ferry ride was taken to La Digue. This island, at 10 km<sup>2</sup>, is the fourth largest of the granitics, and ornithologically is notable for being the stronghold of the Seychelles Paradise Flycatcher; indeed the island's Veuve Reserve was set up to support this bird. Following a fruitless search of the reserve, the birds eventually found us. An inquisitive male and two females alighted very close by as they investigated the intrusion to their home. La Digue is also well known for the exposures of spectacular granite, remnants of the rifted Gondwanaland. The granitic nature of the Seychelles islands makes them unique, in that they are the only oceanic islands not coralline or basaltic in nature.

### **Day 7 Mahé**

The last day was spend on Mahé. The trip had been a success, with all 12 endemics sighted, and it only remained to tackle the last item on the agenda, that other well-known Seychelles endemic, the local SeyBrew Beer.

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**Plate 60.** Matsudaira's Storm-petrel off Seychelles Bank. © H Shirihaï

## New pelagic seabird records from Seychelles

by Adrian Skerrett

While the land mass of Seychelles in the western Indian Ocean is tiny, the Seychelles Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) spans 1,374,000 km<sup>2</sup> between approximately 4°S and 10°S and 46°E and 54°E. Pelagic seabird sightings in the Seychelles EEZ have been relatively scarce over the years due to a lack of observers. Most sightings have been restricted to opportunistic observations on normal inter-island shipping routes and at certain times of year (especially the cruise ship season of December to April). This has meant that there has been a lack of sightings east of the main islands of Mahé, Praslin and La Digue where there is no inter-island traffic, despite suggestions that this region (especially the eastern edge of the Seychelles Bank) may be of huge importance to pelagic seabirds. There has also been a shortage of sightings far from land during the austral winter, when southern pelagics are most likely to be seen.

Seychelles is the only country in the region to have a formal records committee which collects and authenticates records of all bird species (Seychelles Bird Records Committee, SBRC). Elsewhere in the region (and historically in Seychelles), information comes from a variety of sources including trip reports, published sources, museum specimens, ringing recoveries and more recently, geolocator records. Some of these sources lack any verifiable details, so need to be treated with caution given identification difficulties.

At present, all petrel species recorded in Seychelles are classified by SBRC as vagrants. However, new records accepted since 2010 give a tantalising glimpse of the possibility that some species currently treated as rare vagrants may actually be regular in the Seychelles and the region, either as passage migrants or seasonal visitors. These records come from:

- A geolocator study conducted at Round Island, Mauritius in 2010–2011 (information supplied to SBRC by Malcolm Nicoll, Carl Jones and Vikash Tatayah).
- Observers aboard the cruise ship *Costa Romantica* on 9 February 2011, entering Seychelles waters (unusually) from southeast of Mahé (Andy Ross and Mike Barnett).
- Alphonse Island Conservation Centre (Island Conservation Society, Seychelles)
- Records from an observer accompanying a seismic survey vessel in June–July 2014 (Emma Juxon)
- The first chumming operation over the Seychelles Bank 25–26 November 2014 (Hadoram Shirihai and Adrian Skerrett)

Records of the following pelagic seabirds have been accepted by SBRC from the above sources:

**‘Round Island Petrel’ *Pterodroma arminjoniana***

(Readers may have read WRP Bourne’s note in *Sea Swallow* 63 p38.) The ‘Round Island Petrel’ breeds at Round Island, Mauritius. This is a hybrid population comprising about 80% Trindade Petrel *Pterodroma arminjoniana*, 10% Herald Petrel *P. heraldica* and 10% Kermadec Petrel *P. neglecta* (Bourne 2014). A geolocator study has been conducted and findings include thirty birds entering Seychelles waters in 2010–2011 and apparently feeding around the Seychelles Bank, particularly the eastern edge, but also throughout the Seychelles EEZ east and north of Farquhar.

At the time of the study, there had been no sight records in Seychelles. There has been one subsequent sight record accepted by SBRC, south of Coëtivy on 9 February 2011. The description of this bird suggested it was probably a hybrid, mainly Trindade but with an admixture of both Herald (grey nape and head, pale face and white chin) and Kermadec Petrel (white-flashes on wings). These hybrid birds are common on Round Island. These findings suggest this species is probably regular in Seychelles waters.

**Flesh-footed Shearwater *Puffinus carneipes***

Prior to 2014, SBRC had accepted five records: near Desroches (2), near Frégate, near Farquhar and near Mahé, in May, October and December (Skerrett *et al.* 2011). In 2014, 100+ were observed 4–26 July 2014 in the vicinity of 4°49’S 57°31’E, near the eastern edge of the Seychelles Bank. A single bird was observed off Denis Island at 03°29’S, 055°47’E on 25 November 2014. These records have been accepted by SBRC.

This species breeds mainly in October–May in Australasia, with an isolated population of perhaps 4–600 pairs on St Paul Island in the southern Indian Ocean (HANZAB). Outside the breeding season southwestern Australian birds cross the southern Indian Ocean to reach the Arabian Sea and Gulf of Oman (HANZAB, del Hoyo *et al.* 1992). The large number of birds seen in Seychelles in July 2014 suggests that this species may be a regular visitor to the Seychelles Bank, either transiting to the Arabian Sea or perhaps some at least remaining in Seychelles waters for the duration of the non-breeding season.



**Plate 61.** Wilson's Storm-petrel, off Seychelles Bank. © A Skerrett

#### **Jouanin's Petrel *Bulweria fallax***

This species breeds on Socotra, July–November (Taleb 2002) and is suspected to breed elsewhere in the northwest Indian Ocean from Somalia to Oman. It has been suggested it may be a regular migrant to the Malagasy region October–February, but the true status is clouded by difficulty of identification and paucity of observations (Safford and Hawkins 2013).

There were eleven Seychelles records prior to 2010: near Aldabra/Cosmoledo (4), near Farquhar (2), near Alphonse/Desnoeufs (2), near Bird (2) and between Cosmoledo and Amirantes, October–December, January–April and July (Skerrett *et al.* 2011).

On 9 February 2011, at least thirty birds were seen from near Agalega, about 60 nautical miles south of the Seychelles EEZ at approximately 9°45'S, 56°28'E to near Coëtivy at approximately 7°50'S, 56°05'30"E. One was also photographed at approximately 5°17'S 56°53'E on 3 July 2014. The large number seen in 2011 suggests it may be regular off the Seychelles Bank at this time of year during the non-breeding season. It was slightly disappointing that none were seen during the chumming expedition of November 2014, although it is hard to conclude very much from this. More work is needed.

#### **Bulwer's Petrel *Bulweria bulwerii***

The first bird of this species was found at night on the hill at Cousin Island in June 2009. The second record for the Seychelles was of two birds seen at approximately 5°14'S 57°41'E in June 2014. Elsewhere in the Malagasy region Bulwer's Petrel is believed to be a scarce migrant with most reported south of Réunion. It has also recently been recorded in the southern Mozambique Channel and amazingly found nesting on Mauritius, 9,000 km by sea from the nearest known Pacific colony (Merton and Bell 2003). However, there are too few Seychelles records to draw any conclusions at this stage as to its true status.

### **Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus***

Interestingly, the first record of any pelagic species in Seychelles was one brought to the attention of SBRC by the RNWBS website. This was a single bird of this species at 0.82°S, 53.83°E (193 miles north-northwest of Bird) captured on board SS *Kent* for 9 hours, departing flying south on 23 October 1962. In the Malagasy region, records are concentrated in April/May and October/November, suggesting that most are on passage (Safford and Hawkins 2013). There are many published reports, some claiming large numbers, but none supported by detailed documentation or a specimen, and there are very few dated and itemised records, so the status in the whole region remains uncertain (Safford and Hawkins 2013).

SBRC accepted 7 records prior to 2014: near Bird (2), near Farquhar, near Desnoeufs, near St François, near Denis and near D'Arros, October/November, April and July; plus one storm-petrel which was probably this species near Cousin, in June.

During the chumming expedition of 25–26 November 2014, twenty-five birds were observed north and east of Denis Island at five different sites. This is significantly higher than the combined number of birds observed in all previous records. It suggests they are certainly under recorded and may be relatively common at certain times of year in Seychelles.

### **White-faced Storm-petrel *Pelagodroma marina***

The first observations of this species were seven birds observed by the author in three separate locations over the Amirantes Bank 9–12 May 1995. All birds were heading north, suggesting possible passage from southern breeding grounds (Skerrett 1995).

There were no further records until a single bird was seen on 26 July and another on 27 July 2014, over the eastern edge of the Seychelles Bank. There are too few records to conclude very much, but it is undoubtedly under recorded and may be a regular passage migrant.

### **Black-bellied Storm Petrel *Fregetta tropica***

The first record for Seychelles was a live specimen found ashore at Alphonse Island. There have been two recent records in 2014 both over the Seychelles Bank, one at

approximately 4°27'S 56°46'E on 28 July 2014 and one off Denis Island at 03° 47'S 056° 11'E on 26 November 2014. Again there are too few records to conclude that this may be a regular migrant or austral winter visitor to Seychelles waters but like other pelagics it is certainly under recorded.



**Plate 62.** Black-bellied Storm-petrel off Seychelles Bank. © H Shirihaï

### **Matsudaira's Storm-petrel *Hydrobates matsudairae***

Only known with certainty to breed on the Volcano Islands, southern Japan, outside the breeding season it apparently migrates to the Timor Sea off northwest Australia, and then west into the Indian Ocean. There has been a widely held assumption that this species winters mostly in the equatorial belt around the Seychelles and west to East Africa but proof has been lacking. Until 2014, a record of two birds between Providence and Alphonse in August 2000

was the only documented record from anywhere in the western Indian Ocean, although there are a number of other published reports without descriptions available for authentication from Seychelles and elsewhere in the region. However, the chumming expedition of 25–26 November 2014 located 14 birds at five locations near to Denis Island. This suggests the species may be common in certain locations at certain times of year. More study is needed to assess seasonality, range and abundance.

**Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus***

The first record of this species was of two adult pale phase and one unaged between Coëtivy and Agalega at approximately 8°17'S, 56°11'E on 9 February 2011.

Other pelagic seabird records accepted by SBRC are:

**Southern Giant Petrel *Macronectes giganteus***

One record: off Récif July 1992. Also one record accepted as Southern/Northern Giant Petrel *M. giganteus/hallii* off Aride June 2005.

**Cape Petrel *Daption capense***

One record: between Cosmoledo and Assumption September 1984.

**Herald Petrel *Pterodroma heraldica***

One: on the hillside, Cousin June 2009.

**Kermadec Petrel *Pterodroma neglecta***

Five records: Cousin August 2003, June 2004, August 2006, January 2007 and two in November 2009. The 2004 bird was caught and ringed and later resighted as one of the pair in 2009. One bird from this pair was observed with a chick on 24 November 2009, a remarkable breeding record.

**Swinhoe's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma monorhis***

Three records: one found dead at Praslin October 1996, one at sea between Aldabra and Assumption October 1996 and one between Aldabra and Assumption December 1998.

**South Polar Skua *Catharacta maccormicki***

Four records, all single birds off Aride Island: July 1998, July 1999 and two separate dates in July 2000.

**Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus***

Five records: one at Frégate February 1994, one at Bird Island January 1995, one off Aride December 2002–January 2003, one at Denis Island August 2007 and one at Bird Island July 2013.

**Discussion and potential for future studies**

The fact that many of the new observations for Seychelles come from expeditions of just a few days illustrates there is still much to learn about the status of pelagic seabirds in Seychelles. The Seychelles Bank appears to have great potential for new discoveries. In addition to the Round Island study mentioned above, a study using GPS devices on Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus pacificus* breeding at Aride Island adds weight to the belief the eastern edge of the Seychelles Bank is a rich feeding area. This study aimed at identifying the main foraging areas used during early chick-rearing and assessing at-sea foraging habitat selection showed that birds favoured one main foraging area, located approximately 100 km east of the colony just off the Seychelles Bank (Cecere *et al.* 2013).

The series of discoveries of pelagic seabirds on the hillside at Cousin Island (Bulwer's Petrel, Herald Petrel and Kermadec Petrel) is intriguing. In particular the breeding record of Kermadec Petrel raises the possibility that more petrels may one day breed in Seychelles or even that they may already do so in as yet undiscovered locations. It should be noted that Cousin is a very small island and one that is relatively easy to traverse even at night, whereas other potential breeding islands notably Aride are larger and more precipitous, so that chance discovery of small numbers of breeding petrels is less likely.

Undoubtedly there is more to be discovered. The first chumming expedition of 25–26 November 2014 produced particularly exciting results and further details of these including insights into identification should be available soon. It is hoped that funds can be raised for further chumming expeditions at different times of year and in different areas. An assessment of distribution should take into consideration other locations around the Seychelles Bank, particularly its eastern edge from Bird Island south towards Coëtivy, where significant upwelling of nutrients occurs during the prevailing southeast winds that blow during the austral winter. This investigation should also examine other potentially interesting locations elsewhere in the Seychelles EEZ, notably the Amirantes Bank and the waters around the Farquhar and Aldabra groups.

## Acknowledgements

I am grateful to other members of Seychelles Bird Records Committee (Michael Betts, John Bowler, Ian Bullock, David Fisher, Rob Lucking and John Phillips). Also to Malcolm Nicoll, Carl Jones, Vikash Tatayah for geolocator records and to Mike Barnett, Emma Juxon, Andy Ross and Hadoram Shirihai for observations and records.

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# From Tokyo to the Volcano Islands and back; some seabirds of the Northwestern Pacific

by Dr Colin Rogers

Colin Rogers has led over 80 pelagic trips from Port MacDonnell in South Australia as well as participating in a number of voyages off the east coast of Australia. Further afield he has taken pelagic trips off New Zealand and Chile, travelled to the Antarctic via the Falklands and South Georgia, and participated in the first seabirding trip to the central Pacific in 2006. All photographs by the author

On 28 April, 2015, I was fortunate to join five other committed sea-birders and photographers onboard the yacht *Sauvage* for a 25 day trip from Misaki Port near Tokyo to the waters off the Izu, Bonin (Ogasawara) and Volcano Islands. The main objective was to locate and photograph at sea both the newly re-discovered Bryan's Shearwater, *Puffinis bryani*, Pyle *et al.* (2011), Kawakami *et al.* (2012), and the seldom seen, let alone photographed, Bannerman's Shearwater, *P. bannermani*.

This task proved more difficult than first thought. First, the taxonomy of *Puffinis* shearwaters is evolving, with Bannerman's Shearwater given species status by Onley and Scofield (2007) and del Hoyo and Collar (2014) from its former position in the Tropical Shearwater group as *P. bailloni bannernani*, as in Dickinson and Remsen (2013, 180) for example. Second, the identification criteria for Bannerman's in the leading Field Guide, Onley and Scofield (2007), seem more relevant to the new species, Bryan's Shearwater, as described by Pyle *et al.* (2011). In addition, although usually much further south, it is possible that Tropical Shearwater, *P. bailloni*, could occur in waters adjacent to the Volcano Islands. Rather than engage in an analysis of the identification of these birds as Bannerman's Shearwater, I have presented a range of photographs showing the variety of plumages recorded and readers can draw their own conclusions. One thing we were sure of was our lack of success in locating Bryan's Shearwater as described by Pyle *et al.* (2011, 522) with facial pattern typical of the Little Shearwater group and as illustrated by del Hoyo and Collar (2014, 387).

While on passage we also had ample opportunities to see good numbers of other sought-after seabirds including Short-tailed Albatross, *Phoebastria albatrus*, Streaked Shearwater, *Calonectris leucomelas*, Wedge-tailed Shearwater, *Ardenna pacifica* (most pale phase), and the two dark fork-tailed Storm-petrels, Matsudaira's, *Oceanodroma matsudairae*, and Tristram's, *O. tristrami*, not to forget the Bonin Petrel, *Pterodroma hypoleuca*. Photographing from a yacht also meant that we could obtain eye-level views that would be difficult if not impossible from a larger vessel, particularly if birds could be attracted by occasional drips of fish oil.

## The route

The trip was effectively divided into two parts by the weather. Apart from one rough night the trip down to the Volcano Islands took twelve days in exceptionally calm conditions. There was little opportunity for sail and we motored for most of the way. That meant excellent conditions for photography as we made our way south past the

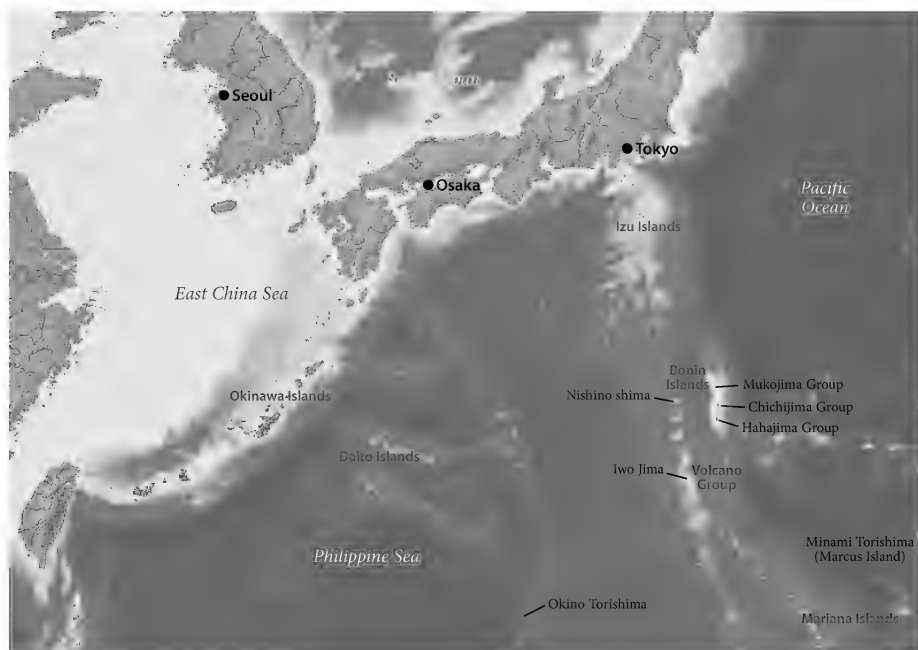


Figure 1. Voyage of the yacht *Sauvage*, April 2015.

Izu Islands, Torishima and then after a short stop at the Bonin Islands, sailing on to the Volcano Islands. All the while the weather was improving and getting warmer as we approached the tropics.

The speed and to some extent the route of the return leg of the trip was dictated by the weather which began to deteriorate as a typhoon Dolphin formed to the south. To the north another typhoon (Noul) passed over Torishima and on the return leg we had about 24 hours north of Torishima in the tail end of that typhoon with rough seas making photography almost impossible. We spent a day in a sheltered anchorage in a port at Miyakejima and another at Habu on Oshima as a cold front swept down from the north. We arrived back in Misaki Port on 22 May.

## The birds

Hundreds if not thousands of Streaked Shearwater, *Calonectris leucomelas*, dominated the northern leg of the trip between Misaki Port and Torishima.

But of particular interest for all on board were the Japanese Murrelet, *Synthliboramphus wumizusume*. These birds are more common off the north coast of Japan but a small population hangs on near Sanbondake rocks off Miyakejima. There they are threatened by Black-tailed Gull, *Larus crassirostris*, that have followed fisherman into the area. The vulnerability of this species at this location is illustrated by the photograph in Plate 64 showing a chick still covered in down but on the water. Fortunately the sea was flat calm and covered by a thick mist that afforded it some protection.





**Plate 63.** Many Streaked Shearwaters made close passes to the yacht.



**Plate 64.** Japanese Murrelet with chick off Sandondake rocks near Miyakejima.

From the second day out the two brown fork-tailed Storm-petrels, Matsudaira's, *Oceanodroma matsudairae* and Tristram's, *O. tristrami* began to appear and both were seen daily throughout the trip apart from the last three days on the return leg before landing at Misaki Port. The numbers of birds made it inevitable that some good pictures would eventually be taken as the weather improved and we found our sea legs. Many Tristram's showed signs of feather wear which is consistent with winter breeding. On one occasion a large (post breeding) flock composed of several hundred Tristram's Storm-petrel was observed feeding over a calm ocean.



**Plate 65.** Matsudaira's Storm-petrel showing the prominent white shafts to the bases of the primaries that are visible at a considerable distance.



**Plate 66.** Tristram's Storm-petrel lacks the obvious white primary shaft streaks and has a more prominent wing bar.

On the first day out from Misaki Port we encountered four Short-tailed Albatross and several Black-footed Albatross *Phoebastria nigripes*, near some fishing boats, but the majority of Short-tailed Albatross were in the vicinity of Torishima where we encountered groups of mostly immature and sub-adult birds loafing on the water a few kilometres off the island. Plate 67 illustrates a typical plumage of the Short-tailed Albatross observed.

The population of Short-tailed Albatross is now thought to be in the region of 2000 birds, which represents a significant recovery from the low point of less than a hundred birds in 1933, and the premature announcement of extinction in 1949.

There were still many juvenile birds on the island, along with some Black-footed Albatross, on what looked like a rather precarious slope below some steep and unstable cliffs. Japanese ornithologists are now trying to stabilise the slope and encourage the birds to move to a more suitable location. However, between our first and second visits, the area was subjected to an earthquake and a typhoon neither of which seemed to have any impact on the colony. In addition the current location seems ideal for juvenile birds to launch into their first flight and land safely on the ocean, and this makes this area an attractive nesting site.



**Plate 67.** Sub-adult Short-tailed Albatross were relatively common in waters off Torishima.



**Plate 68.** Ventral view of Bonin Petrel.

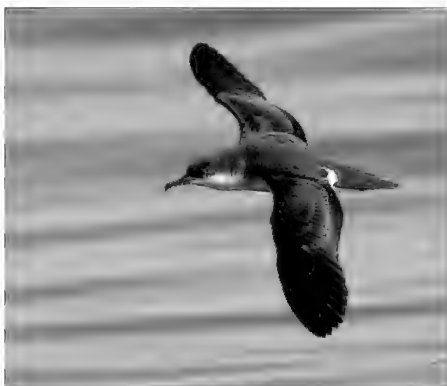
Further south, our target around the Bonin Islands was Bryan's Shearwater but it proved elusive and/or absent both on the way south and on the return leg. What did appear in increasing numbers were Wedge-tailed Shearwater and Bonin Petrel. Both gave excellent views as illustrated in Plates 69–70. The vast majority of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters sighted were pale phase birds as illustrated in Plate 69. Only a very small number of dark phase birds were recorded but there was a noticeable proportion of dusky or intermediate phase as illustrated in Plate 70. Both species occurred in increasing numbers as we approached the Volcano Islands, particularly in the vicinity of Miami Iwo Jima.



**Plate 69.** Wedge-tailed Shearwater (pale phase).



**Plate 70.** Wedge-tailed Shearwater (intermediate phase).



**Plate 71.** Dorsal view of *Puffinis* shearwater showing long slender bill, indistinct collar, dark feathering on the head to below the eye, a distinct eye ring, white tips to greater upper wing coverts and distinct white 'saddlebags'.



**Plate 72.** Ventral view of *Puffinis* shearwater showing long bill, largely white underwing with dark smudging along the leading edge of underwing, distinct saddlebags and dark under tail coverts.

We spent a few days in the vicinity of Miami Iwo Jima and managed about 70 sightings of *Puffinis* shearwaters thought to be Bannerman's Shearwater and many photographs were taken. Unlike Streaked or Wedge-tailed Shearwater, these shearwaters were not ship followers but did divert to investigate any other birds that were following the yacht. Appearance and departure of the birds were rapid and required continual readiness for what seemed to be random appearances relative to the more measured and leisurely approach of other shearwater species. Nevertheless, the calm sea conditions meant that it was possible to get some good photographs.

As this is a seldom seen species I have included several dorsal and ventral views of these shearwaters in Plates 71–78. Clearly these birds do not accord with the illustrations and descriptions of Bannerman's Shearwaters in Onley and Scofield (2007, Plate 37) who stress a short bill, black cap that barely meets the eye and a white under tail with a black tip. If anything the Onley and Scofield description and illustrations are more consistent with Bryan's Shearwater as illustrated by del Hoyo and Collar (2014, 387).



**Plate 73.** Ventral view of *Puffinis* shearwater showing long slender bill, dark ulnar bar on the underwing and pale fringes to under tail coverts.



**Plate 74.** Dorsal view of *Puffinis* shearwater with greyish head, hint of an eye ring, indistinct collar and white 'saddlebag' with white merging to dark under tail coverts.

It is possible that some of these birds are juveniles as suggested by the white fringes to their upper wing coverts (as in Plate 71). Others, with greyish worn plumage about the head, (as in Plate 76) may be adults. It is thought that Bannerman's Shearwater breeds on Miami Iwo Jima along with almost the entire population of Matsudaira's Storm-petrel. On the return leg, approximately 15 *Puffinis* shearwater were also seen off Higashi Jima in the Bonin Islands, in a flock of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, but again no Bryan's Shearwaters could be identified.

As with all island breeding populations, large numbers of birds, particularly Wedge-tailed Shearwaters and Matsudaira's Storm-petrel gathered in rafts off their breeding islands before sunset, only going ashore after dark. A full moon may delay that process until after moonset or birds may not go ashore at all if moonset is too late. On one occasion, at first light, a sleeping Matsudaira's Storm-petrel floated past within 10 feet of the yacht. When breeding, most birds depart before first light for feeding areas and we sometimes encountered *Puffinis* Shearwaters feeding with Wedge-tailed Shearwaters sixty miles from Miami Iwo Jima.



**Plate 75.** Ventral view of *Puffinis* shearwater with broad dark leading edge and dark ulnar bar on the underwing, partial collar and dark under tail coverts.



**Plate 76.** Lateral view of *Puffinis* shearwater showing greyish head down to eye level, and distinct grey collar.



**Plate 77.** Ventral view of *Puffinis* shearwater showing prominent dark wedge rather than an ulnar bar on the underwing with a greyish collar and head, and dark under tail coverts.



**Plate 78.** Ventral view of *Puffinis* shearwater showing prominent double collar, dark hood to below the eye, variable dark marks on the leading edge of the underwing, white saddlebag and dark under tail coverts.

Other tubenoses recorded in small numbers on the trip included Laysan Albatross, *Phoebastria immutabilis*, (2), Leach's Storm-petrel, *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*, (7) and Wilson's Storm-petrel, *Oceanites oceanicus*, (1). On the return leg several Bulwers Petrels, *Bulweria bulwerii*, were recorded but few came close enough to get good photographs. Also on this leg Short-tailed Shearwaters, *Ardenna tenuirostris*, appeared in increasing numbers and a few Flesh-footed Shearwaters, *Ardenna campeipes* put in an appearance.

Brown, *Sula leucogaster* and Red-footed Boobies, *Sula sula* were also breeding on some of the islands with Brown the more common. Red-tailed Tropicbirds, *Phaethon rubricauda* were at Torishima and Miami Iwo Jima. A couple of Long-tailed Jaegers, *Stercorarius longicaudus*, made close passes as did at least one South Polar Skua, *S. macconnicki*, while a number of Pomarine Jaegers, *S. pomarinus* gave distant views.

In addition to seabirds we also encountered small numbers of migrating waders; Ruddy Turnstone, *Arenaria interpres*, Pacific Golden Plover, *Pluvialis fulva* and a solitary Little Ringed Plover, *Charadrius dubius*. At least two groups of Oriental Pratincole, *Glareola maldivarum* seemed interested in the yacht as they headed north and two White-winged Tern, *Chidonias leucopterus* in full breeding plumage were feeding on insects in the lee of Torishima on the return leg. Several Barn Swallows, *Hirundo rustica*, made unsuccessful attempts to land on the rigging.

All considered, and despite the non-appearance of Bryan's Shearwater, I would rate the trip as my most interesting and rewarding pelagic.

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# Birdwatching at Britannia Royal Naval College; a reflection of changes 1948 to 2015

by Dr Richard Porter, college lecturer  
and RNBWS Dartmouth rep  
for over 20 years

It is sixty-seven years since the publication of the first Bird Report of the Field Club of The Royal Naval College, Dartmouth. The Club had been in existence for many years and published a regular report of its activities in the College's *Britannia Magazine*. That year, 1948, it noted the formation of the RNBWS:

*It is with great pleasure that we learn of the foundation of the RNBWS in the able charge of Major NAGH Beal RM. This society will mean a great deal to the many keen bird-watchers leaving the college for a naval career.*

The bird report has much ornithological significance but perhaps its main point of interest to those former cadets of Britannia Royal Naval College is the personalities involved in running the BRNC Field Club at the time.

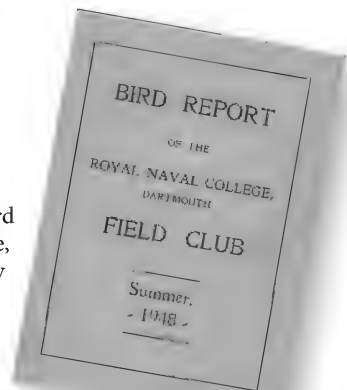


Plate 79. John Barlee. © Dr R Porter

Dartmouth has been the home of RN Officer training since 1863, first on the hulks in the River Dart and from 1905 ashore at Britannia Royal Naval College. Until 1955 the College was in effect a public school. Prior to 1948 boys would enter as cadets at the age of 13, their parents would pay fees and they would receive their education at Dartmouth. After 1945 the new Labour government sought to introduce changes. The age of entry was raised to 16 to appeal to grammar school boys and fees were abolished; both moves to try and diminish what was seen as an elitist institution. This also affected the officers of the Field Club. John Barlee who had joined the Dartmouth teaching staff before the war, was moving on to pastures new, and in the Editorial of the 1948 Field Club report we find the following.

*It is with great regret that we say good-bye to Mr John Barlee. He is known all over the country as a first-class bird photographer, and his latest book, 'Birds on the Wing' shows well his ability. But as well as this, he is a*

*first class field ornithologist, and many a Naval cadet has been guided along the ornithologist's path by him. He will certainly be a great loss to the College, and we can only hope that some day he may return.*

While a member of staff in 1942 he happened to be in the College when it was bombed on September 18th of that year. He had a near miss, being very close to both of the bombs that were dropped, but finding himself to be alive and well, if somewhat dusty and shaken, he went straight to the Common Room and retrieved his camera to record the bomb damage within an hour of it occurring. His photographs now hang on the College walls, close to the place where he took them. Ornithology and photography were two of John's life long interests - he was a Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society - and he combined both in his book 'Birds on the Wing', published in 1947. (*Sea Swallow* readers who have visited the RNBWS website and looked up old copies of *Sea Swallow* will find in the very first issue of all an article by John on photography of birds in flight).



Plate 80. Mark Sugden.

John Barlee also provided the photographs for a number of the sport 'Do It This Way' books, the most notable being 'Rugger: Do It This Way' by Mark Sugden and Gerry Hollis published in 1946. Mark Sugden was also a Master at BRNC and taught Modern Languages, but is perhaps more famous for his exploits as an Irish Rugby Union international. He was Captain in 1931 when Ireland beat England for a third successive time, and he also played cricket for Ireland.

Following the bombing John Barlee moved with the College to Eaton Hall in Cheshire, on the Duke of Westminster's Estate, where he met and became engaged to a Laura Attlee who was serving with the WRNS at the time. Laura was Clement Attlee's niece and on their return to Dartmouth in 1946 John decided to move on, believing, so Laura told me, that the Attlee government intended to close Dartmouth. Fortunately for Dartmouth John later returned and his widow Laura still lives in the village of Slapton, within a few minutes walk of the wonderful bird observation site of Slapton Ley.

It is pleasing to note that the legendary Miss Bulla is mentioned in the 1948 Report, this for her 'endless Field Club Sandwiches'. When interviewing past cadets for the College's centenary celebrations in 2005 her name was mentioned more than most. We know that Second Officer AMC Bulla was the Catering Officer while the College was evacuated to Eaton Hall in Cheshire after the bombing of 1942. Here she was attended by Wren Steward Joyce Howard: "My sole charge was Second Officer Bulla - the legendary Miss Bulla! She was certainly difficult to keep up with. I travelled everywhere with her, in lorries and trucks into town and outlying farms where she would scrounge extra food, mainly vegetables and fruit, for her cadets. Keeping her uniform decent was a nightmare." Miss Bulla continued in the post of Catering Officer on return to Dartmouth and into civilian life until she retired at the end of 1966.



Plate 81. The Headmaster, J.W. Stork. © Dr R Porter



Plate 82. Miss Bulla. © Dr R Porter

In 1955 the age of entry to the College was raised to 18 years; Masters became Lecturers, the Headmaster became the Director of Studies - and the Headmaster by this time was Joe Stork, CB CBE MA, who had been on the Field Club Committee in 1948.

That 1948 Field Report was written and edited by Cadet T. M. Gullick, who left the Navy as a Lieutenant, became highly successful in business, and then went on to achieve recognition in the ornithological world as a promoter and leader of ornithological tours. In 2012 he made the headlines: "World's greatest birdwatcher sets a new record. Former naval officer spots his 9000th species in Indonesia". His exploits were mentioned in *Sea Swallow* Vol.45 (Page 8) and there was substantial article about him in Vol. 62 (Page 73).

Those Ornithological Records for the Dartmouth Area: September 1946–March 1948 as published in Cadet Gullick's report actually covered quite a large area of South Devon as well as the grounds of BRNC, with frequent references to sightings at Berry Head, Slapton Ley, Dawlish Warren and the Exe and Teign estuaries. It is therefore not an easy task to make comparisons with the avifauna of today as records in recent years have been for BRNC only, but the Golden Jubilee Edition of *Sea Swallow*, Vol.45 gives a resumé and comparison of the species seen in 1948 with those of 1996, when I reported that "Cirl Bunting are still recorded, though only seen around Prawle - one of the last strongholds in Britain. We still get Black Redstarts in the college and the Sparrowhawk is now fairly common, unlike 48 years ago".

Fast forward to today, and there have been some interesting trends.



### **Raven**

Recorded as nesting in Old Mill Creek in 1947 and still seen flying over BRNC. A pair has been frequently seen in Old Mill Creek in 2015 but there is no evidence that breeding occurred.

### **Jackdaw**

Reported in 1948 as a common resident with several pairs breeding in the College buildings. Today they continue to breed in the College grounds and make much use of the many unused chimneys around the College which may have been in use more in 1948. They have bred in recent years in the ventilation shaft over the Senior Gunroom where nest material once fell onto the dining tables, and as a result the room could not be used for dining until after the young had fledged. BRNC looked upon Birds' Nest Soup quite differently after that event. The shafts are now sealed to prevent further nests being built.

### **Girl Bunting**

This has been the great success story in the South Hams. In 1948 it was reported as resident in the area but the report did not say exactly where. Today, while not seen at BRNC it is a locally common resident, most notably in the Prawle area. It remains on the BoCC Red list.

### **Great Spotted Woodpecker**

2015 was the first year that this species has been recorded as breeding at BRNC. In 1948 it was reported to be a scarce resident.

Back to the College. Today BRNC has a much older intake of students, they are at the College for a much shorter time than before, and their training is very intensive, so young officers have little leisure time in which to pursue their interests. However, there may be some hope for the future, for the College is returning to a three term entry; traditional competitive sport will return and hopefully there may be some time to interest young officers in the joys of bird watching.

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Plate 83. The form of Brown Booby present in Coiba Island is *brewsteri*. © Dr F Olmos

## A life on the ocean wave

by Peter Carr

### PART ONE - Off the coast of Peru

In spite of the title (which for those who do not know is the Regimental March of the Royal Marines), most of my career in the Corps (1978–2011) was spent ashore. It was only in the final two years of service on Diego Garcia that I clocked up some regular sea-time and the appeal of recording seabirds at sea became apparent. I decided then that on retirement I should up my game in the pelagic birding stakes. So with that familiar Regimental March reverberating in my mind, I have headed to sea with camera and binoculars whenever the opportunity has arisen. The first such opportunity was in October 2013 off Callao, Peru, where I hired a boat along with the services of an excellent local guide, Jean-Paul Perret. It was to be an eight-hour venture that took me some 30 miles off shore and into the nutrient rich Humboldt Current. My travelling companion was a work colleague, Sir Philip Thomas, a very experienced world birder and excellent photographer.

The upwelling of the Humboldt Current offshore supports an abundance of marine life and it was these deep water areas we were heading for. However, even before departing from Callao port, we encountered birds that were not in the least camera shy - Belcher's *Larus belcheri*, Grey *L. modestus* and Kelp Gull *L. dominicanus*, Royal *Thalasseus maxima* and Near Threatened (NT) Inca Tern *Larosterna inca*, Peruvian Pelican *Pelicanus thagus* and Peruvian Booby *Sula variegata*.

Navigating between San Lorenzo and the former prison/quarantine island of Frontón we encountered the passerine Surf Cinclodes *Cinclodes taczanowskii*. This rather drab bird is range-restricted and a sought after Peruvian species, but sadly surf conditions and the birds' restless behaviour precluded any worthwhile photographs. However, we did manage to photograph the IUCN classified Vulnerable (V) Humboldt Penguin *Spheniscus humboldti*, Guanay *Phalacrocorax bougainvillorum* (NT) and the beautiful Red-legged Cormorant *P. gaimardi* (NT).

The next stop was Isla Palomino, with its flourishing South American Sea Lion *Otaria flavescens* colony and accompanying scavenging Turkey Vultures *Cathartes aura*. From Isla Palomino we headed out to the Humboldt Current to do some chumming, hoping to see some true pelagic species in their natural environment, and almost immediately spotted an Endangered (EN) Peruvian Diving-petrel *Pelecanoides gamotii*. This Humboldt Current endemic has suffered a massive decline in numbers in recent years, with a population of millions reduced to probably only a few thousand today. Guano extraction is probably the main cause of this catastrophe (*BirdLife International*, 2015).

Next came a flurry of sea mammals with a pod of Dusky Dolphin *Lagenorhynchus obscurus* porpoising past (a species that was seen several times throughout the trip) and, possibly the highlight of the trip, two enormous Blue Whales *Balaenoptera musculus* breaching not 100m from our vessel. Sadly no-one on board managed to get photographs of these giants of the sea. Humpback Whale *Megaptera novaeangliae* also graced our binoculars but sadly, not our cameras - a recurring theme for this trip. The only other non-birding event was a passing Leatherback Turtle *Dermochelys coriacea* which also appeared very unconcerned about the sound and sight of boat engines in its immediate vicinity.

It was the chumming in the far-out waters that produced the most excitement and the best photographic opportunities. Expected species such as Southern Giant Petrel *Macronectes giganteus*, Sooty Shearwater *Ardenna grisea* and White-chinned Petrel *Procellaria aequinoctialis* were seen, as were some less expected birds such as Pink-footed Shearwater *Ardenna creatopus*, Chilean Skua *Catharacta chilensis* and South American Tern *Sterna hirundinacea*.

This area normally has large numbers of storm-petrels, especially the local form of Wilson's (Fuegian) Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus chilensis* (a bird soon likely to be considered a species on its own), and White-vented (Elliot's) Storm-petrel *O. gracilis*, with smaller numbers of Markham's *Oceanodroma markhami*, Wedge-rumped *Oceanodroma tethys* and Ringed (Hornby's) *Hydrobates hornbyi*. Seabirds from the Galapagos also regularly use this stretch of the Humboldt, and Waved Albatross *Phoebastria irrorata* and Swallow-tailed Gull *Creagus furcatus* are possibilities. To those one may add large wintering flocks of Red-necked Phalaropes *Phalaropus lobatus*. However, only the first two mentioned put in an appearance during our trip. As to what we might have seen, they are listed in <http://www.slideshare.net/NatureExpeditions/cfapepathpelagic-birds-list>.

All in all, this trip was a great success. It was easy to organise, and our guide was extremely competent; we saw some terrific birds and mammals, and there is the tantalising prospect of a return trip, to see the birds that eluded us.

Actually, I did go back to Peru, some six months later, but without time enough for a sea trip. My endeavours were confined to a walk with colleague Dr Fabio Olmos along a stretch of the coastline near Callao. Here we found large numbers of seabird carcasses and in a 100m stretch of beach counted 35 Peruvian Boobies, 8 Sooty Shearwaters and 4 Peruvian Diving-petrels.

The cause of death was assumed to be starvation, possibly linked to an El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) event that was developing in the eastern Pacific at that time. Sea Surface Temperature records show that these El Niño conditions have persisted and are likely to be present throughout the Northern hemisphere summer of 2015 - this news does not bode well for the declining populations of Humboldt Current specialists such as Peruvian Diving-petrel. For more information on this see <http://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/analysismonitoring/lanina/ensoevolution-status-fcsts-web.pdf>.

(Thanks to my work colleagues and good friends, Sir Philip Thomas and Dr. Fabio Olmos, for commenting on this part of the article and for the journeys we took together).

## **PART TWO - Azuero Peninsula pelagic, Panama**

Soon after that depressing walk along the carcass-strewn beaches of Peru in late May 2014, I went to Panama and this article describes five boat trips taken off the Azuero Peninsula from the small village of Palmilla in the Mariato district on the western Azuero Pacific coast. These were two return journeys out to Coiba Island and a further trip exploring the southern shores of Cerro Hoya National Park and out to some 10 miles off shore (see Map One for the areas visited).

Pelagic birding from the western Azuero Peninsula is in its infancy and is being developed, primarily by Tanager Tourism (<http://tanagertourism.com/>), which was founded in 2006 and is run most efficiently by Loes Roos and Kees Groenendijk. In addition, a few deep sea birding excursions have been run from Punta Mala, a small town on the south-eastern tip of the peninsula, producing some exciting new records for Panama (see <http://www.xenornis.com/2010/09/punta-mala-deep-water-pelagic-two.html>).

Our first trip took place on 15 June 2014 and was my first visit to Coiba. I felt it was very fitting for a former Royal Marine as we waded out to our craft carrying all our stores for our overnight stay in the Coiba Island National Park. Magnificent Frigatebirds *Fregata magnificens* were already circling the boat as we set off, and next were American Black Tern *Chlidonias niger surinamensis*, the most prolific seabird on our transits, despite the late month. (It was presumed there is a large non-breeding population which summers in the area, as there were at least a thousand of these birds feeding on fish fry off a stand of mangroves on Coiba Island, along with a flock of 60 Brown Pelicans *Pelecanus occidentalis* and a single Common Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica vanrossemi*). Once we were in deeper waters the first of the true pelagics started appearing in the form of a Galapagos Shearwater *Puffinus subalaris*. Only one was positively identified on the first trip but this species was present in higher numbers later.

Approaching Coiba itself, a familiar species from my research in the central Indian Ocean appeared, a Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus*, though here it was the subspecies *ridgwayi* (del Hoyo *et al.*, 2014). However, I could not see the difference in the head colouration of the noddies that field guides suggest. The same cannot be said of one

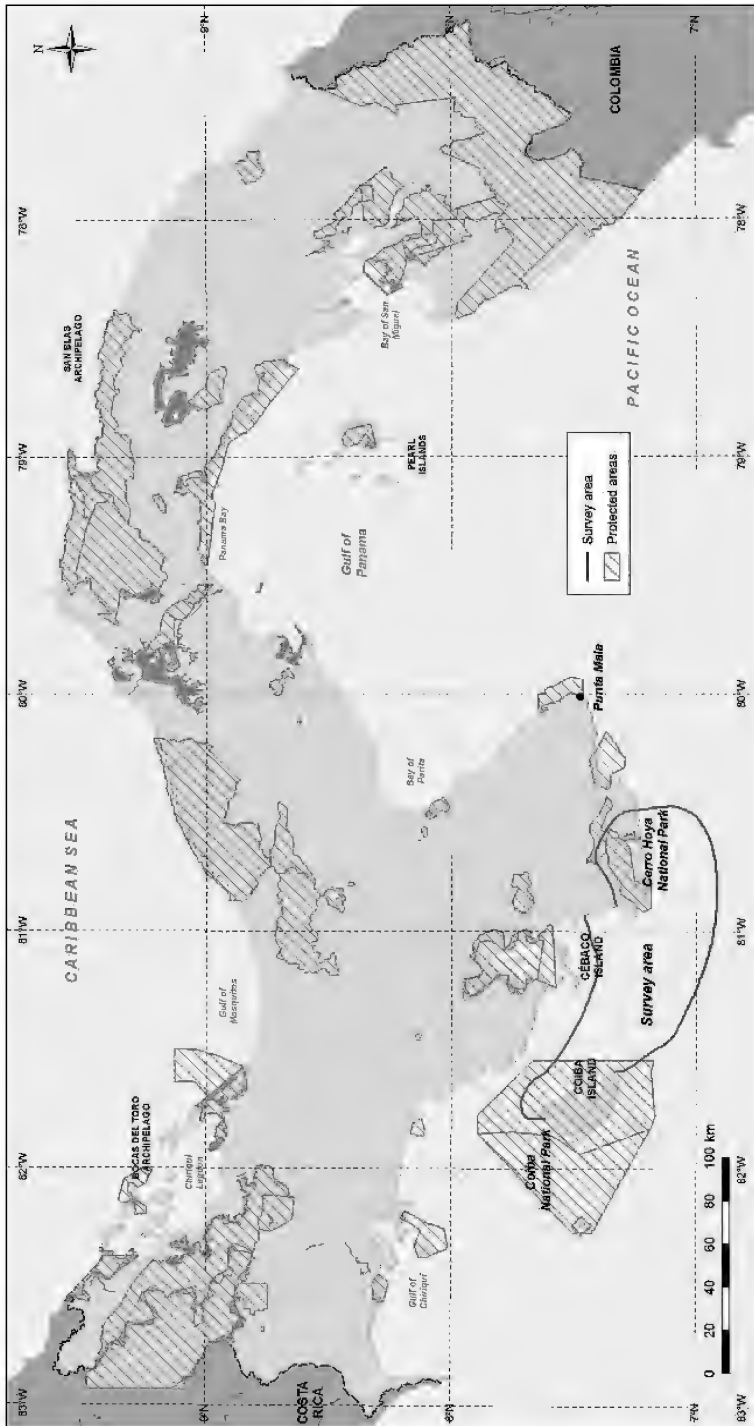


Figure 1. Seabird watching off Panama.



**Plates 84–86.** (Top) Blue-footed Booby were found nesting on rocky islets. (Below left) Nazca Booby. (Below right) Peruvian Booby. © P Carr



of the other pan-equatorial species resident here and also found in the Chagos, Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster*, where the males of the subspecies *brewsteri* found off Panama are with their pale heads most certainly morphologically distinct from the dark-headed Indian Ocean ssp. *plotus* (del Hoyo *et al.*, 2014). On the rocky islets off Coiba Island 16 roosting Blue-footed Booby *Sula nebouxi* and four Peruvian Booby *Sula variegata* provided excellent photographic opportunities as did more Brown Booby. The other seabirds found on this first trip were Royal Tern *Thalasseus maximus* and Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*.

The second trip out to the island was on 24 June 2015. The weather was calmer this time and as a result more seabirds were observed and identified. Joining the previous list of terns was another pan-tropical species, the sub-pelagic Bridled Tern *Onychoprion aneathetus*. Two birds of the subspecies *nelsoni* were seen, but I found

these indistinguishable from the birds I was familiar with in the central Indian Ocean, the subspecies *antarcticus* (del Hoyo *et al.*, 2014). The tubenoses were the highlight of this particular trip; Galapagos Shearwaters were present in three figures, including a single feeding group of 60 birds, but it was the storm-petrels that were to prove the highlight. Many birds had to remain as probables, but we positively identified five Black *Hydrobates melania*, three Wedge-rumped *H. tethys* and a Least Storm-petrel *H. microsoma*.

The final trip left on 29 June and returned on 02 July 2014. I was fortunate to be joined by two excellent ornithologists who were birding their way from California to Patagonia. Josh Beck and Kathi Borgmann's incredible ornithological adventures can be followed at <http://www.birdsofpassage.wordpress.com>. Additional species to the previous trip lists were two Laughing Gulls *Larus atricilla* and a single Nazca Booby *Sula granti*, the bird of the trip for me. I say bird of the trip because boobies have been at the centre of my work in the Chagos and are still the main focus of studies out there. Bar the Indian Ocean endemic Abbott's Booby *Papasula abbotti*, the Nazca Booby was the last of the booby family for me to see. The single bird we encountered was sitting on the water, was initially passed off as flotsam, but I managed to snap a single (and only) photograph of it before it flew off.

On completion of the trips I pondered: was there a relationship between the carcasses we witnessed on the Lima shores, the building El Nino in the eastern Pacific and the occurrence of what are thought to be Humboldt Current endemic species such as Nazca and Peruvian Booby so far north? Instinctively one feels yes, particularly for those birds that had apparently died through lack of food. As to El Nino causing species' dispersal north to Panama, the limited evidence available suggests that changing sea surface temperatures further south may shift fish-eating species' foraging ranges north (and likely other directions). For example, Loftin (1991) conducted 10 cruises in the Gulf of Panama between August 1968 and August 1969 (weak El Nino event years) and encountered neither booby species. The stronger El Nino we witnessed however certainly appeared to be driving them away from their usual feeding and foraging ranges with some dispersal north. With climate change likely to initiate more regular sea surface temperature anomalies and their long-term impact on seabirds not being fully understood yet, this is an area of conservation research that deserves study. RNBWS members can help with this research by submitting their sightings of seabirds at sea to *Sea Swallow* and the RNBWS World Database.

My thanks to Dr. Fabio Olmos for his company in Panama and for his comments on the draft of this part of the voyage; to Zoe Brown for her wonderful company throughout Panama; to Tanager Tourism for their friendship, flexibility and professionalism, and to Josh and Kathi, safe travels and good birding.

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# Seawatching in Cyprus in Autumn

by Colin Richardson

## INTRODUCTION

Cyprus is the third largest island in the Mediterranean Sea (after Sicily and Sardinia). Although a member state of the European Union, it is actually in the Middle East, 40 miles south of the Turkish coast and 65 miles west of the Syrian mainland. Its birdlife is predominantly of western Palearctic origin, with a country species list of 395 (end of 2014), of which 52 are breeding residents. The rest are generally migrants, either passage migrants, winter visitors, summer visitors or accidental visitors. The island is thus a perfect place for the study of bird migration and one way of observing this is by sea-watching. Coastal bird migration was well-studied in the 1950s and 1960s in the early days of the Cyprus Ornithological Society (COS), first by founder member WRB Bourne and subsequently by DWH Adams, MB Casement, SJ Christensen, PR Flint, PF Stewart, R Frost, GF Rivers, FJ Walker, T Roth, A Corso and AJ Stagg, many of whose names will be familiar to members of RNBWS. Even before the 1950s, migration in Cyprus and across the Mediterranean Sea was documented by Hubert Lynes, GF Wilson, HM Morris, RE Moreau and others. Cyprus attracts millions of migrant birds in spring, when the land is green and wetlands are at their best after modest winter rains. In autumn however the land is parched, after months of drought. Migrant birds tend not to linger and most simply pass by or fly over

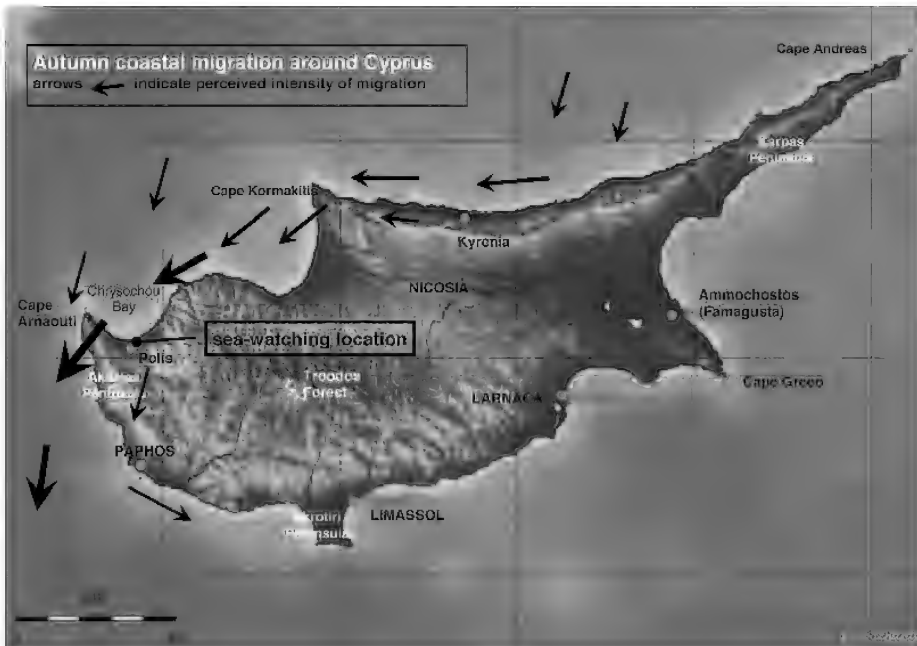


Figure 1. Autumn coastal migration around Cyprus.



without stopping. The marshes are in poor condition, and although the salt lakes are usually dry, the Akrotiri Salt Lake does provide overnight safety to groups of Demoiselle Cranes *Grus virgo* which use the morning thermals to continue their journey south. Autumn can thus be a challenging time to witness migration, as birds are usually invisible to the naked eye, flying over at altitude or heading around the island far offshore, on their way to Africa.

So I found myself during the dog-days of summer on 27 August 1999 on a cliff top on the north coast of the Akamas Peninsula with friends David Whaley and Alan Crabtree, who had many more years experience of watching birds in Cyprus than I. We were waiting for signs of autumn migration and it was that day that I witnessed - to my great surprise, since it seemed still to be mid-summer - wave after wave of migrating herons passing over. This spectacle made me ponder the potentially under-recorded element of bird migration in Cyprus. Most of these birds were flying over the neck of the peninsula, never to set foot on the island, heading determinedly south towards Africa. It was only after becoming resident on the island in 2002 that I was able to study this phenomenon further, spending a number of consecutive autumns on the north coast near Polis, watching migration in Polis Chrysochou Bay. This note refers to the period 2004–2014 and some of my results are presented here.

### Seawatching from the Akamas Peninsula July to October, 2004–2014

Amongst the most frequent species I encountered arriving off the sea or coasting during this period were Garganey *Anus querquedula* (57 records, 10989 birds), Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* (47 records, 5697 birds), Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* (44 records, 966 birds), Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* (21 records, 892 birds), Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* (31 records, 242 birds), Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus* (31 records, 234 birds) and Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* (16 records, 304 birds). All these are detailed in the following pages. Groups of Demoiselle Cranes often stop over in Cyprus and many arrive on the island in the late afternoon via the north coast of the Akamas. However I was never in the right place at the right time and failed to witness any coming off the sea, although I did see hundreds flying over on several occasions while bird watching inland. It was noteworthy that a number of other species not normally associated with sea crossing behaviour were seen regularly coming off the sea at relatively low altitude. These included Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba* (17 records, 917 birds), Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* (27 records 426 birds), Common House Martin *Delichon urbicum* (12 records, 940 birds), Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* (15 records, 21 birds) and European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris* (7 records, 120 birds). A number of Mediterranean Yellow-legged Gulls *Larus michahellis* (45 records, 218 birds) were also recorded, but this may have been due to the proximity of the breeding colony on Agios Georgios Island. Reasonable numbers of Scopoli's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea* (20 records, 69 birds) were also recorded. These were probably wandering birds from colonies west of Cyprus (WRP Bourne pers.comm.)

### The Histograms

The histograms below indicate the timing and abundance of each species. Each vertical bar indicates the total number of birds recorded. On the monthly axes the months are split into thirds. The first and middle thirds are each ten days for all months, while the last third varies.

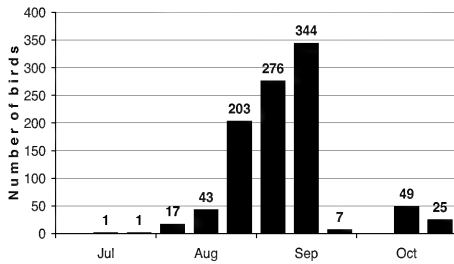


Figure 1. Grey Heron

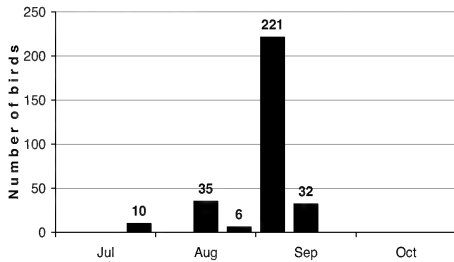


Figure 2. Little Egret

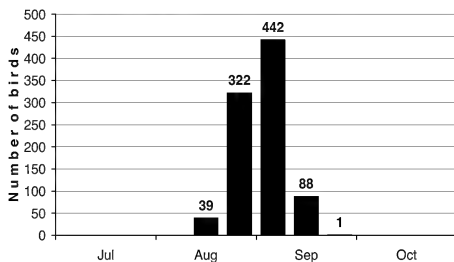


Figure 3. Purple Heron

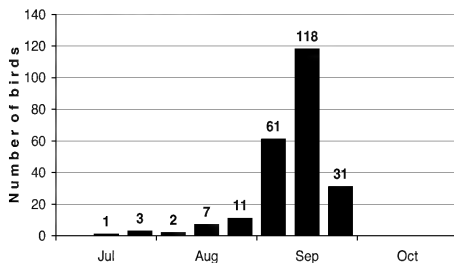
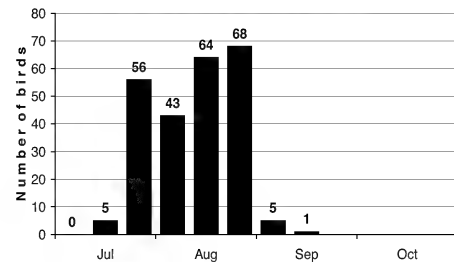
Figure 4. Lesser Black-backed Gull *L. fuscus*

Figure 5. Common Sandpiper

## The Species

### Garganey *Anus querquedula*

A common passage migrant and occasional breeder. First autumn sightings were late July, with the southward movement peaking late August to early September, with stragglers to early October. The earliest were nine on 22 July 2013, the latest eight on 1 October 2011. Largest numbers seen during the period were 875 on 31 Aug 2009 and 800 on 14 Sep 2013. Flint & Stewart (1992) list a maximum of 5400 off Polis on 1 Sep 1982. Groups of 15–40 birds usually arrive off the north coast of Cyprus and fly in an anti-clockwise direction around the island (pers. obs). On good days numbers built up to several thousand in Polis Chrysochou Bay where they were noted resting or flying around at wave height before eventually rising up and flying south over the narrowest part of the Akamas Peninsula. Flint & Stewart (1992) suggest they are part of a broad front of water birds which head south across the whole of the eastern Mediterranean. Very occasionally 1–10 other ducks were caught up in the flocks, including Pintail, Shoveler and Teal, but compared to the Garganey their presence was negligible.

### Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*

Common passage migrant and opportunist breeder. During the period it was noted from mid-July to mid-September, peaking in August. Most occurrences were of wave-height formations arriving in Chrysochou Bay from the northeast. Group sizes varied from 20–60 birds, occasionally more, while groups of 15 or less were infrequent. The largest group was 220 on 3 Aug 2014 and the largest daily count was 506 on 11 Aug 2014. These early mass movements were interesting and may relate to birds from breeding colonies in Romania or Ukraine. In 2014 groups of post-breeding birds arrived on the Poda Reserve, on the western Black sea coast of Bulgaria from early June and departed by late July. (Plankov pers.comm). These flocks, probably from the Black Sea, reached the north coast of Cyprus, circling the island in an anti-clockwise direction before heading south

from the Akamas Peninsula (Richardson 2011b). This migration pattern was recognised by WRP Bourne and others in the 1950s (Bourne 1960).

### Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

*Common and widespread passage migrant and winter visitor.* It is particularly frequent on passage over the sea in autumn, noticeable from late August to October, sometimes to mid November, as groups coast anti-clockwise around the island. The earliest migrant was one on 19 Jul 2010 and the latest was 25 on 28 Oct 2008. Daily passage averaged 24 per day between mid July and mid September with a maximum day count of 144 on 13 Sep 2014. On arrival in Polis Bay, groups appeared confused when confronted by the landmass of the Akamas Peninsula to the south and they would circle over the coastal plain for up to 2 hours before finally rising high enough to pass over the hilly neck of the peninsula.

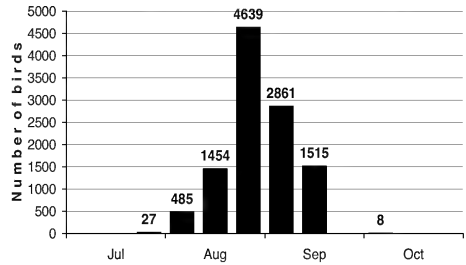


Figure 6. Garganey

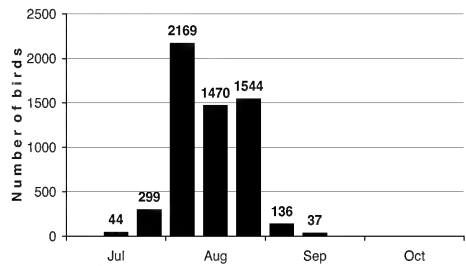


Figure 7. Glossy Ibis

### Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

*Common spring and autumn passage migrant.* In autumn, ones and twos appeared along the coast from early August, coasting in an anti-clockwise direction around the island. The earliest encountered was one on 11 Aug 2014, the latest, one 25 Sep 2003. 50% of flocks late Aug to late Sep consisted of over 30 birds and none were less than 8 together. The movement built up to a peak in late September, many in flight formation with Grey Heron. The largest group was 157 on 8 Sep 2004. Many were seen resting in trees on Polis plain, including in a eucalyptus forest at Polis camp site, or in a nearby *Phragmites* reed-bed, before heading south over the Akamas Peninsula and on to Africa. It is rare inland in autumn, most suitable wetlands being dry after the hot summer.

### Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

*A common passage migrant and scarce winter visitor.* Autumn passage can start in late Jun, noted from inland records, but my coastal watching in Polis Bay started in July when the first record was two on 19 Jul 2010. During the period, groups would arrive low off the sea and rest nervously on the beach, sometimes for several days. Over 50% of flocks were 5 or more birds, with a maximum of 24 on 7 Aug 2014. The latest was one 18 Sep 2014.

### Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

*The sub-species L. (f.) fuscus, sometimes known by the vernacular name 'Baltic Gull' is a fairly common passage migrant and irregular winter visitor.* (The other main race which occurs in Cyprus as an uncommon migrant is L. (f.) heuglini, sometimes known as 'Siberian Gull', but was not recorded on this survey). Movement started hesitantly in July, with passage steadying in September. Peak numbers were seen late September. The earliest was one on 20 Jul 2014; the latest was 15 on 25 Sep 2013. Oddly none were seen later, but perhaps they were flying

far offshore by this time. Most sightings were of 4 or less together, the largest groups of 9 together, with a day maximum of 45 on 20 Sep 2012. Migrating birds generally flew at medium height over the sea, between 100m to 2km offshore. Most reports of 'Lesser Black-backed Gull' in Cyprus probably refer to this form. This gull makes a long overland journey from Scandinavia in autumn to cross the eastern Mediterranean towards the East African coast, via the Red Sea (where I have watched them coasting south of Suez).

### **Little Egret *Egretta garzetta***

*A very common passage migrant, uncommon winter visitor and occasional breeder.* First movement was noted from late July, becoming common mid-August to October, peaking mid September. Most groups were of 10 or less, with a maximum of 106 on 10 Sep 2005. Some groups roosted on rocky islets, including Agios Georgios Island, at the west end of Polis Chrysochou Bay, but were often disturbed by pleasure craft and fishermen. Some, including these flocks which made landfall further west of the observation site, may have been overlooked, especially after mid-Sep. The largest recent count on record was 834 at (nearby) Baths of Aphrodite 16–22 Sep 1999, with a peak count of 380 on 20 Sep.

### **Acknowledgements**

The results of my seawatching from the beach at Polis might not have seen daylight had it not been for the encouragement of Peter Flint, who was always interested in my findings. The numbers of Glossy Ibis appear to have increased over the years and when Peter compared my sightings with his from earlier days at coastal locations in the north, I thought the general autumn coastal passage was worth retabulating in this short note. I am grateful to Bill (Dr. WRP) Bourne for providing a copy of his early published work on coastal migration and for suggestions on how to improve this note. Thank you also to my friends and correspondents who have sent me their seawatching sightings in the same area over the years, so confirming the strength and direction of bird movements around the island.

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Plate 87. Grey Phalarope. © N Cheshire

## The great storm in the English Channel on the night of 15/16 October 1987

by Dr WRP Bourne

On 15 October 1987 RFA Tidespring took part in the ‘Thursday war’ off Portland Bill and then set out in the evening in overcast weather for the Persian/Arabian Gulf. The night was a little turbulent, though not enough to keep me awake. It was therefore startling to be informed when I switched on the news next morning that we had just passed through the centre of what *The Times* described on the 17th as “the most violent storm ever recorded in Britain” (or at least since the night of 26/27 November 1703, when about 8,000 people perished), with winds reaching 134 mph in Normandy and 94 mph in London, and over 15 million trees blown down in SE England.

By the time I was free to watch birds it was 10 am and we were 25 miles south of Land’s End in overcast weather with a subsiding SW wind and swell. I put in an hour between then and 1600 to see how the birds had weathered the storm. The commonest species was the Gannet *Sula bassana*, with 149 adults and three late immatures, of which 104 were flying south, 17 resting on the water, and the rest mucking about. There were three Great Skuas *Catharacta skua*, four Kittiwakes *Rissa tridactyla*, four Lesser Black-backed Gulls *Larus fuscus*, one Greater Black-back *L. marinus*, two Razorbills *Alca torda* and a Great Shearwater *Puffinus gravis*, of which nine were flying south and four west, rather a low total for the area at this season. We continued to have strong SW winds and did not see many more birds as we sailed south to the Mediterranean over the next three days, though I did see a phalarope off Portugal.

The seabirds seen in Britain at this time have been summarised by R.A.Hume and D.A.Christie (*British Birds* 82: 191–208). A fair number of petrels, skuas, Grey Phalaropes *Phalaropus fulicarius* and Sabine's Gulls *Larus sabini* were reported in the SW, with smaller numbers of a wide variety of species scattered all over England, but no exceptional rarities. Important totals include thousands of British Storm-petrels *Hydrobates pelagicus* and many Grey Phalaropes off south Devon, with a thousand Kittiwakes and hundreds of British Storm-petrels returning west off southern Cornwall on the 18th. Off Portland Bill there were 800 Kittiwakes on the 17th and 240 Great Skuas the following day. Over a hundred Little Gulls *Larus minutus* were seen in Hampshire and 85 Sabines Gulls returned west past Hengistbury Head, Dorset, in the course of the following week, while forty Sabine's Gulls and ten Little Gulls reached London, and fifteen Grey Phalaropes, ten Sabine's Gulls and five Great Skuas arrived at Graffham Water in Cambridgeshire.



Plate 88. Sabine's Gull. © A Williams



Plate 89. Sabine's Gulls. © A Williams

It is notable that while thousands of birds were seen briefly along the south coast, only a few hundred appear to have been blown inland, though there was an unprecedented number of Sabine's Gulls. Few birds appear to have been found dead as in some great wrecks in the past, and most soon returned west again. Clearly the storm must have struck very suddenly in a limited area, so that it only affected local NW European species for a short time, and especially the Sabine's Gulls and Grey Phalaropes which were travelling high across the Atlantic at the peak of their autumn migration between North America and western Iberia (*Irish Birds* 3: 175–198), and flew into the west side of the storm. Most of the birds must still have been in good condition despite meeting winds of over 100 knots, because few died; those swept NE towards Britain were able to return west rapidly when the wind fell, while those still at sea were behaving normally next day.

**Bill Bourne**

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# Obituary

**Joseph Bryan Nelson,  
1932–2015**

by Dr WRP Bourne

Bryan Nelson was an expert on the Pelecaniformes. Born in Shipley, Yorks., on 14 March 1932, he obtained a B Sc in Zoology at St Andrews University, and went on to study Blackbirds at Oxford. They proved elusive outside gardens, and inspired by the work on boobies during the BOU centenary expedition to Ascension he soon moved on to a comparative study of their local



**Plate 91.** Gannet, Firth of Forth, 2015. © H Scott



**Plate 90.** Joseph Bryan Nelson MBE, 1932–2015. © Dr WRP Bourne

representative the Gannet, spending long periods camping out with his wife June on the bleak Bass Rock in the Firth of Forth, and going on to secure a series of grants to visit all the other sulids around the world. In 1968–69 he was then the first Director of the Azraq Desert Research Station, Jordan, before joining the staff at the Zoology Department at Aberdeen University. In addition to further travel he wrote a number of books, many scientific papers and popular articles, and made a number of films. He was recently associated with the establishment of a Scottish Seabird Centre with film connections to the Bass Rock and Isle of May at North Berwick on the Firth of Forth, and he eventually retired to Kirkcudbright. He was a tall, blonde, active, charming person and splendid lecturer. He died after prolonged illness on 29 June 2015.

**W.R.P. Bourne**

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# Notes on seabird reports received 2014

by Stephen Chapman

This year's report again follows the format previously adopted, and systematically notes highlights from the material received from members at sea. It aims to be concise, list all observers and their voyages, and capture highlights of their sightings for the year 2014. It concentrates more on observations of unusual and seldom reported species; observations from areas rarely visited; large concentrations of birds; reports of evidence of migration and reports of unusual behaviour and feeding observations. The taxonomy follows the Revised RNBWS Checklist of Seabirds (2013).

## Seabird observations and tracking

In analysing the data received and writing this report one may question the value of visual reports now in an era of birds of known origin carrying data loggers and GPS transponders, such that birds can be tracked and their daily positions plotted. Much more information can be gleaned from such methods. At first there were size limitations in fitting geolocational data loggers on birds, but as in all micro-chip based technology over time devices get smaller, use less energy and last longer; also, an important consideration, costs come down. Without such devices we would not have tracking and oceanic range maps, and know, for example, the extent of dispersal in the Atlantic of the small population of the rare Bermuda Petrel *Pterodroma cahow*. The tracking of this petrel shows that at least some Bermuda Petrels were making it as far east as the Porcupine Bank in the period from April to early June<sup>1</sup>. So perhaps it is less surprising that one should be visually recorded by Niall T Keogh, without using chum, in the seas to the west of Kerry on 19th May 2014<sup>2</sup>.

Boyd's Shearwater *Puffinus boydi*, an endemic to Cape Verde Islands, are thought to disperse over the central Atlantic but ship sightings are scarce and unreliable. Identification of Boyd's from a ship at sea is

not straightforward. However, Simon Cook reported a single in May 2013 (*Sea Swallow* 63, p71). Researchers used geolocation-immersion loggers to track 32 birds from 2007–12. Salt-water immersion data provided information on at-sea activity. After breeding, birds were found to migrate 1,000 to 2,600 km to the west from April to June, remaining in the central Atlantic Ocean for 115 days on average until August through to October<sup>3</sup>. Prenuptial migration lasted for seven days on average. By using tracking devices and stable isotope analysis the researchers could describe for the first time detailed changes in distribution and activity pattern of this shearwater over its entire annual life cycle<sup>4</sup>.

If that is not enough, consider this report (Smith, 2014) of an adult male Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* that was tagged on Fetlar, northern Scotland. This Phalarope left Shetland on 1 August 2012 and crossed the Atlantic to the Labrador Sea off eastern Canada in 6 days, then moved south to reach Florida in September, crossed the Gulf of Mexico into the Pacific Ocean and reached an area between the Galapagos Islands and the South American coast by mid-October, where it remained until the end of April, returning by a similar route until the tag battery failed as the bird was crossing the Atlantic Ocean.

Clearly we have a lot more to learn about the migration of seabirds. Our knowledge will continue to grow using all the tools we have available. There are many other examples one could cite. It is interesting to note that at the 2015 British Ornithologists' Union three-day conference *Birds in time and space: Avian tracking and remote sensing* a total of 30 papers were presented of which 13 papers concerned seabird distribution, migration and population dynamics. All that said, I recall a meeting with Dr Russell Wynn, Chairman of the Seabird Group, who affirmed that visual observations are of immense value in the understanding

dispersal, migration and distribution of seabirds. At RNBWS we continue to enjoy finding seabirds at sea, keeping records and maintaining a unique on-line database of observations in support of these aims.

## Some highlight of 2014 voyages

David Ballance continues to voyage with Fred Olsen Cruise Lines and submitted valuable and finely detailed reports from *MV Braemar* when he sailed to Norway and Spitzbergen reaching 80°N latitude. He reports that the ship, small by modern cruise ship standards, is well equipped for observing seabirds, with a continuous promenade deck and an excellent forward lounge, the Observatory, perched on top of the bridge. In fine weather there is access to the foredeck, unlike her sister ship *Black Watch*. On the Braemar voyage the seas were exceptionally ice free, permitting entry to both of the Spitzbergen fjords that lead to settlements. In his customary manner David divided his time into blocks of two or three hours, logging all seabirds sighted according to RNBWS conventions.

A second voyage on board *MV Serenissima* of 2,000 tons took him around the Mediterranean to disembark in Casablanca. As he reports there was not much to see in those waters in October and November.

Simon Cook on *MV Plancius* continued to experience challenges with the weather of the southern oceans. In March the vessel repositioned from Ushuaia, Tierra del Fuego, to Praia, Santiago Island in the Cape Verde Islands at the end of the Antarctic summer season. The early part was riddled with difficulties: a storm-forced anchorage in the Beagle Channel for 33 hours, a slow crossing of the Drake Passage, beset in pack ice for 12 hours, the visit to South Georgia reduced to one day through having to divert to Port Stanley in the Falkland Islands for a medical evacuation, and a slow crossing to Stanley. As a consequence, the voyage was prolonged by several days and Gough Island could not be visited as was originally planned.

For Simon the best day of the season was the day after leaving the Falkland Islands for South Georgia, 18 November. In addition to six species of albatross he also saw Great Shearwater, *Ardeanna gravis*, numerous Soft-plumaged Petrels *Pterodrom mollis*, unprece-

dent numbers of Atlantic Petrel *Pterodroma incerta* far south, and several Grey-backed Storm-petrels *Garrodia nereis*. The day was rounded off with a Chilean Swallow *Tachycineta meyeni* that landed on the ship.

During the year Warrant Officers Steve Copey and Tony Tindale undertook deployments on *HMS Protector* and again took advantage of opportunities for seabird recording and taking photographs. Voyages took them from the South Atlantic to the Southern Ocean and Antarctica; thence 400 nm offshore north up the west coast of South America, through the Canal to the Caribbean Islands, crossing the subtropical Atlantic to Cape Verde, and then again to the Southern Ocean and Antarctica. If one were to mention just one highlight, it must be the sightings and pictures of the Pincoya Storm-petrel *Oceanites pincoyae* off southern Chile. This storm-petrel is a new species that was first described by Peter Harrison *et al.*, based on a specimen collected at sea in Seno Reloncavi, Chile on 19 February 2011 and 11 other individuals that were caught, examined, and released (Harrison *et al.*, 2013). The description was first noted in *Sea Swallow* (Bourne, 2013).

Keen seabirders from southern India, S. Prasanth Narayanan and friends, took a fishing vessel to sea from Alappuzha, also known as Alleppey, a town south of Cochin in the state of Kerala. We would welcome more reports from representatives who are able to make voyages offshore.

In the early months the author sailed across the Pacific from Napier to Ushuaia on *STS Lord Nelson* details of which voyage are on page 34 while some observations are contained in this report.

Our thanks go to these observers for their systematic records.

Observers are referred to by their initials. Dates refer to 2014 unless otherwise noted. Positions are given in degrees and decimals of degrees of latitude and longitude. nm = nautical miles (1.852 km), Ad = Adult, h = hour(s), imm = immature, C = census sheets, R = report sheets.

Table 1.

David K. Ballance (DKB)	<i>MV Braemar</i>	Dover to ports in Norway and Spitzbergen and return. July–August 2014. 18R
	<i>MV Serenissima</i>	Malta to ports in Sicily, Tunisia, Sardinia, Spain and Morocco. October–November 2014. 20R
Peter Carr (PC)	<i>MV Spirit of Enderby</i>	Bluff, New Zealand to Snares, Bounty, Antipodes, Auckland, Campbell, Macquarie and Chatham Islands. November 2014. 20R.
Stephen E Chapman (SEC)	<i>STS Lord Nelson</i>	Auckland, Napier, Chatham Island, Ushuaia. December 2013–February 2014. 10R on Excel.
Capt. Neil Cheshire (NC)	<i>MV Sehet Mustapha Aydogdu</i>	In the Bosphorus Eminönü to Anadolu Kavagi and return. October 2014. 1R.
	<i>MV Prof Dr Aykut Barka</i>	Eminönü to Anadolu Kavagi and return. October 2014. 1R.
Simon G. Cook (SGC)	<i>MV Le Boreal</i>	Four voyages from Ushuaia to the Antarctic Peninsula. January–March 2014
	<i>MV Plancius</i>	Ushuaia, to Praia, South Georgia, Falklands, St Helena, Ascension, Cape Verde Islands. March–April 2014. 10R.
	<i>MV Ortelius</i>	Longyearbyen, Spitsbergen for voyages around the islands including a cruise to NE Greenland, and Akureyri. July–September 2014.
Capt. Thomas Johannsen (TJ)	<i>MS Lucy Oldendorff</i>	Gibraltar to Tripoli. March–April 2014 2C
S. Prasanth Narayanan and others (SPN)	Fishing Vessel/Patrol boat	Pelagics off the West Coast of India. September 2013–May 2014. 3R on Excel
WO1 Steve Copesey (SC) and WO1 Tony Tindale (TT)	<i>HMS Protector</i>	South Atlantic, Antarctica, West Coast of South America and Caribbean. December 2013–May 2014. 15R on Excel. Cape Verde, South Atlantic, Southern Ocean, Antarctica. July–October 2014, 10R on Excel. Southern Ocean and Antarctica, December 2014. 4R on Excel.

## PENGUINS *Spheniscidae*

**Chinstrap Penguin** *Pygoscelis antarcticus*. SGC reported c5,000 in the sea and thousands more ashore at different colonies in English Strait, South Shetlands on 2 Feb.

## ALBATROSSES *Diomedidae*

**Wandering (Snowy) Albatross** *Diomedea exulans*. When becalmed in mid-South Pacific SEC had 5 imm on the sea close by at 44.8S, 121W on 15 Jan. On a good day for albatrosses SC and TT noted and photographed five species, including this of which singles were seen on 12 Apr at 45.5S, 75.7W and at 44.4S, 75.4W. **Southern Royal Albatross** *Diomedea epomophora*. In the Le Maire Strait at 55.3S, 64.7W SEC noted 1 Ad on 3 Feb. SC and TT noted singles on 10 Mar at 55.8S, 68.6W; and 2 at 44.4S, 75.4W on 12 Apr; 16 Dec at 52.3S, 57.5W; 17th at 56.2S, 59.4W; and 23rd at 53S, 57.6W. Approaching Chatham Island from the south west, PC

reported 25 in equal numbers with *D. sanfordi*. **Northern Royal Albatross** *Diomedea sanfordi*. SEC noted 1 at 46.1S, 171.5W on 1 Jan and at 44.8S, 124W on 14 and 15 Jan. SC and TT noted singles on 10 Mar at 55.8S, 68.6W; and 2 at 44.4S, 75.4W on 12 Apr. **Waved Albatross** *Phoebastria irrorata*. SC and TT only sightings were single birds on 21 Apr at 6S, 81.6W and another at 5.4S, 81.6W. **Black-browed Albatross** *Thalassarche melanophris*. SEC noted first sighting of 1 imm at 46.1S, 176.1E on 1 Jan but not again until 51.3S, 69.5W on 26 Jan. Off Staten Is at 54.5S, 64.8W rafts of 100+ noted on 3 Feb. TT noted minimum of 70 on 1 Apr at 52.4S, 65W, and later 150+. Off West Falkland SGC recorded c2000 at 51.6S, 61.0W on 17 Nov. **Shy Albatross** *Thalassarche cauta*. TT photographed 5 and SC recorded a minimum of 50 over one hour on 17 Sep off Cape Town at 34.1S, 17.8W. Later the same day they came across two

trawlers in quick succession and whilst not approaching closely it was clear that thousands of seabirds were in attendance with c300 Shy Albatross scavenging along with c200 Cape Gannets *Morus capensis*, 500 White-chinned Petrels *Procellaria aequinoctialis*, and c100 Kelp Gulls *Larus dominicanus*. **Salvin's Albatross** *Thalassarche salvini*. In the Pacific SEC saw a single on 22 Jan at 46.5S, 101W and an uncertain sighting on 25 Jan 49.5S, 94W SC and TT noted and photographed singles, a total of 16, on 12 Apr at 44.8S, 75.7W; at 43.6S, 75.2W and at 44.4S, 75.4W. **Chatham Albatross** *Thalassarche eremite*. SEC noted 3 at 44.5S, 176.2W when passing 6 miles south of The Pyramid, Chatham Island on 30 Dec 2013. On passage from Antipodes Island PC reported 10 around 45S, 178W on 22 Nov, and enjoyed dozens scrabbling for fish offal close off The Pyramid on 24 Nov. **Sooty Albatross** *Phoebastria fusca*. SC and TT recorded 3 sightings on 20 Sep at 39.3S, 7W. **Light-mantled (Sooty) Albatross** *Phoebastria palpebrata*. Crossing the Pacific SEC noted 1 at 44.7S, 124.6W on 14 Jan. In the South Atlantic SGC recorded 1 imm at 40.1S 22.8W on 8 Apr and next day 1 at 38.5S, 17W. SC and TT noted singles on 7 Jan at 57.2S, 31.6W, on 18 Dec at 60.4S, 61.6W and 61S, 61.9W; 22nd at 57.3S, 60.4W; and on 13 Jan 2015 4 at 59.1S, 59.7W.

## FULMARS *Fulmarinae*

**Southern Giant Petrel** *Macronectes giganteus*. SC and TT recorded 20 on 17 Dec at 56.2S, 59.4W. **Northern Giant Petrel** *Macronectes halli*. TT noted 1 on 18 Dec at 59.8S, 61.2W. **Northern Fulmar** *Fulmarus glacialis*. Slow steaming in the Denmark Strait SGC reported 1–2,000+/h around 68N, 19W on 13 Sep. **Cape Petrel** (Cape Pigeon) *Daption capense*. SEC saw 1 that showed characteristics of *D. australe* off Chatham Island on 30 Dec 2013 and then the species was not seen again until east of the Horn at 55.6S, 65.8W on 2 Feb. TT noted minimum of 50 following on 30 Mar at 54S, 64W. **Snow Petrel** *Pagodroma nivea*. In the South Atlantic TT first saw 3 on 26 Dec 2013 at 55.6S, 29.3W. In the Bransfield Strait, where there were lots of bergs and drifting ice, SGC had 30+ at 62.4S, 59.7W on 23 Mar. SC and TT saw 1 on 30 Sep at 53.8S, 40W. In the Scotia Sea, SGC saw 1 at 55S, 36W on 22 Nov. **Antarctic Prion** *Pachytila desolata*. In the Scotia Sea, SGC saw 4,000+ at 55S, 36W on 22 Nov. **Kerguelen**

**Petrel** *Lugensa brevirostris*. In the Scotia Sea SGC recorded 43 (14/h) at 58.7S, 46.8W. SC and TT recorded singles on many days but 60 in two hours is noteworthy on 29 Sep at 53.4S, 29.6E. **White-headed Petrel** *Pterodroma lessonii*. SC and TT recorded singles on 19 Sep at 36.1S, 12.1E and 2 more next day. **Atlantic Petrel** *Pterodroma incerta*. SGC reported unprecedented numbers in his experience with a day total of 11 at 52.3S from 54.0–51.0W on 18 Nov. **Magenta Petrel** *Pterodroma magenta*. On passage from Antipodes Island PC reported 1 at 45.2S, 178W on 22 Nov, and enjoyed another sighting close to Chatham Island late that afternoon. **Black-winged Petrel** *Pterodroma nigripennis*. SC and TT saw 1 on 17 Apr at 23.8S, 78.5W and 2 next day at 18.8S, 17.4W, noting “the back of the bird is similar to *P. externa* but the bold underwing markings clinch the id”. **Black-capped Petrel** *Pterodroma hasitata*. SC and TT recorded a distant view on 1 on 8 May at 28.5N, 79.1W. **Galapagos Petrel** *Pterodroma phaeopygia*. TT photographed and SC saw 2 singles on 19 Apr at 14.2S, 80.3W and next day 2 at 10.4S, 80.5W and 1 at 9.5S, 81.1W. A flock of 12 was noted on 21 Apr at 5.4S, 81.6W. **Juan Fernandez Petrel** *Pterodroma externa*. SC and TT saw a total of over 300 in singles in the period 15–20 Apr from 34.3S, 76.2W to 10.4S, 80.5W. This petrel of course breeds on the islands of the same name which they passed 200 nm to the east. **De Filippi's Petrel** *Pterodroma defilippiana*. SC and TT saw and photographed in total over 30 singles in the period 16–19 Apr from 28.6S, 77.5W to 14.2S, 80.3W. **Stejneger's Petrel** *Pterodroma longirostris*. SC and TT recorded and photographed 3 singles on 13 Apr at 41.6S, 74.2W, noting, “the white forehead, dark cap and half collar and tail pattern gave me the id”. **Bulwer's Petrel** *Bulweria bulwerii*. SGC noted 5 at 4.9N 19.5W on 26 Apr. **Great-winged Petrel** *Pterodroma macroptera*. SGC noted 6 at 46S, 41.5W on 5 Apr. **Soft-plumaged Petrel** *Pterodroma mollis*. SGC recorded total of 8 around 52S, 53W on 18 Nov. **Mottled Petrel** *Pterodroma inexpectata*. SGC recorded 1 at 59.6S, 62.6W on 22 Feb, and a very close sighting of another at 63S, 66.4W on 28th.

## SHEARWATERS *Procellariinae*

**Grey Petrel** *Procellaria cinerea*. On passage from Campbell Is to Antipodes Is PC reported several on 19–20 Nov. **White-chinned Petrel** *Procellaria aequinoctialis*. Unusually far south,

in his experience, SGC recorded 4 approaching the South Shetlands, at 61.9S, 60.2W on 2 Feb. SC and TT recorded a minimum of 100 in an hour on 19 Sep at 34S, 17.8E and more to the west in the following days. **Spectacled Petrel** *Procellaria conspicillata*. En route from the Falklands to Tristan SGC noted these petrels daily from 5 to 10 Apr with 30+/h at 38.8S, 17.8W on 9th. **Sooty Shearwater** *Ardenna grisea*. In the far north SGC reported the only sighting of the summer season at 67N, 19W on 11 Sep. **Flesh-footed Shearwater** *Ardenna carneipes*. In Apr and May by far the most numerous pelagic reported from fishing and patrol boat trips in seas off Cochin area by SPN. **Great Shearwater** *Ardenna gravis*. SGC noted 2–3,000 in a two hour watch at 52.3S, 51W on 1 Apr. Continuing en route from Falklands to Tristan he had daily sightings and from 5 to 10 Apr recorded c30/h. SGC reported a single bird in the far north, flying purposefully south (very close to the ship) at 70.9N, 21.1W, 10nm off the coast of north-eastern Greenland on 7 Sep. SGC recorded 1 at 51.4S, 55W on 18 Nov. **Scopoli's Shearwater** *Calonectris diomedea*. Off Sicily DB recorded 65/h at 36.6N, 15.2E on 30 Oct and 135/h at 36N, 11.4E early next day. Off Algeria DB noted a group of 87 in a single column at 38.2N, 5.1E on 2 Nov. **Manx Shearwater** *Puffinus puffinus*. SGC recorded several southerly sightings at 58.3S, 62.3W, and 1 at 58.4S, 62.1W on 10 Dec. **Yelkouan** (Levantine) **Shearwater** *Puffinus yelkouan*. In the Bosphorus, NC recorded several flocks of 30–70 flying fast and directly through for a total c600+ northbound and c250+ southbound on 14 Oct. In the Marmara Sea NC recorded several flocks of 50–70 (total c450) flying SE parallel to the shore and c150 in two flocks going north at the south end of the Bosphorus on 16 Oct. Off Sicily DB recorded 2 at 36.6N, 15.2E on 30 Oct. **Balearic Shearwater** *Puffinus mauretanicus*. DB saw 2 at 36N, 3.5W on 5 Nov, and a group of 5 in flight just before dawn at 34.1N, 7.3W on 7 Nov. **Audubon's Shearwater** *Puffinus lherminieri*. SC and TT recorded 20+ north of Cuba on 7 May at 23.8N, 82.4W. **Little Shearwater** *Puffinus assimilis*. SGC noted 2 as Sub-Antarctic race at 44S, 35.6W on 6 Apr; while off Chile SC photographed one of 20 birds, appearing to be of this race, at 41.6S, 74.2W on 13 Apr. On passage from Campbell Is to Antipodes Is PC reported several on 19–20 Nov.

## STORM-PETRELS *Hydrobatidae*

### Southern Storm-petrels *Oceanitinae*

#### **Pincoya Storm-petrel** *Oceanites pincoyae*.

Sightings and images of this newly discovered species were submitted by SC with a report, amongst others, of 3 birds 25 nm off the coast at 43.6S, 75.2W on 12 Apr6. SC described the birds as 'Wilson's type storm-petrels with a whiter looking upper wing bar'. He estimates that by the end of the day these birds outnumbered the Wilson's *Oceanites oceanicus* by a margin. **Elliot's Storm-petrel** *Oceanites gracilis*. TT photographed and SC recorded 1 on 20 Apr at 9.5S, 81.1W and a flock of 12 next day at 5.4S, 81.6W. **White-faced Storm-petrel** *Pelagodroma marina*. In the South Atlantic TT saw 4 at 40S, 52.1W on 21 Dec 2013. Off Chatham Islands where they nest, SEC reported groups at 44.1S, 176.7W on 30 Dec 2013; 1 at 44.7S, 139.1W on 10 Jan and 2 at 45.1S, 115.6W on 17 Jan. SGC recorded 3 at 38.4S, 16.7W on 8 Apr. SC and TT recorded and photographed 20+ on 19 Apr at 14.7S, 80.3W; 13 on 20th at 10.4S, 80.5W and 4 later at 9.5S, 81.1W. TT commenting on birds in close proximity to the ship, noted that they are easily identified and by far did the most pattering of the ten species seen; and even at distance this distinctive behaviour allowed a positive id. **Grey-backed Storm-petrel** *Garrodia nereis*. In the South Atlantic SGC recorded 1 at 40.1S 22.8W on 8 Apr. SC and TT noted 20 singles on 20–22 Oct around 51.8S 57W. SGC saw 5 at 52.1S, 52.5W on 18 Nov. SC and TT noted a single bird on 16 Dec at 51.6S 57.3W. **Black-bellied Storm-petrel** *Fregetta tropica*. SGC noted 9 at 61.5S, 60.5W on 23 Jan. SC and TT recorded 1 on 15 Apr at 33.7S, 76.3W. SC and TT often noted ones and twos but on 18 Dec at 61.7S, 62.3W they had a group of 20, and on 30th at 60.6S, 57.4W singles totalling 54 passed. **White-bellied Storm-petrel** *Fregetta grallaria*. SC and TT recorded and photographed 3 on 15 Apr at 33.7S, 76.3W; 7 on 16th at 27.6S, 77.7W and daily sightings to 20th at 9.5S, 81.1W. TT commented, one feature we noticed a great deal was the foot skidding. The birds were constantly touching down on the surface then skidding around into a new direction before taking off again. The whole manoeuvre is over in the blink of an eye and great to watch, he noted.

## Northern Storm-petrels *Hydrobatinae*

**Galapagos** [Wedge-rumped] **Storm-petrel** *Oceanodroma Tethys*. TT photographed and SC recorded 2 on 19 Apr at 14.75S, 80.3W and a total of 13 next day at 9.5S, 81.1W; and 1 on 21st at 5.4S, 81.6W. Finally, total of 7 at 6.5N, 79.6W. **Markham's Storm-petrel** *Oceanodroma markhami*. SC and TT recorded 3 on 18 Apr at 18.1S, 79.7W then ones and twos daily until 21 Apr at 6S, 81.6W. **Hornby's Storm-petrel** *Oceanodroma hornbyi*. SC and TT recorded 1 on 19 Apr at 14.7S, 80.3W then small groups daily until 21 Apr at 6.8S, 81.5W.

## GANNETS and BOOBIES *Sulidae*

**Northern Gannet** *Morus bassanus*. Off Algeria Med TJ noted an adult at 36.8N 1.7E on 16 Mar. At high latitudes DB reported 5 Ad, 2 imm at 70.1N, 25.6E on 26 Jul; 4 Ad at 64.6N, 10.8E and 25 Ad, 10 imm at 63N, 6.8E on 1 Aug; in the North Sea 30 Ad/h, 5 imm/h on 3 Aug. SGC reported a single imm bird in the far north, at 67.7N, 19.1W, 98nm north of Iceland 13 Sep. Approaching Montril DB reported a group of 11 Ad feeding on 5 Nov; 3 Ad when approaching Tangier next day, and 50 Ad/h 3 moving south when approaching Casablanca on 7 Nov. **Nazca Booby** *Sula granti*. TT photographed and SC reported birds that were judged, by the orange coloured bill of adults, to be of this species. It was formerly regarded as a subspecies of *S. dactylatra* but is now recognized as a separate species, originally described by Rothschild 1902. They were seen from 22–26 Apr, from 3.3S, 81.56W into the Gulf of Panama.

## SANDPIPERS, SNIPES

### *Scolopacidae*

**Red (Grey) Phalarope** *Phalaropus fulicarius*. A flock of 20 was noted and one photographed by TT on 13 Apr off Puerto Montt at 41.6S, 74.2W on 13 Apr. Johnson comments on an 'invasion' of this species that extended all along the coast as far as Arauco and lasted until December after which no more were seen until the following spring, late September (Johnson, 1965). So these were late departers or overwintering birds. **Red-necked Phalarope** *Phalaropus lobatus*. on 17 Jan SEC saw a group of 8 small waders with a wing bar and contrasting markings on the back in flight low over the waves which then rose high and were lost from sight which were probably this species, at 45.2N, 115.4W.

## SHEATHBILLS *Chionidae*

**Yellow-billed Sheathbill** *Chionis albus*. At Husvik Bay, South Georgia on 18 Mar TT recovered a dead bird, thought to be from rat poison, and noted another alive on the pier at Husvik on 24 Mar.

## SKUAS and JAEGERES

### *Stercorariidae*

**Chilean Skua** *Stercorarius chilensis*. SC and TT records include 5 single birds well offshore on 15 Apr at 33.7S, 76.3W; and 1 next day at 38.6S, 77.5W. **Pomarine Skua** *Stercorarius pomarinus*. Off SW Spitzbergen SGC reported 4 at 76.5N, 15.2E on 25 Jul. Off Kerala at 9.5N, 76.4E SPN reported 2 on 20 Oct. **Long-tailed Skua** *Stercorarius longicaudus*. In the South Atlantic SGC recorded 1 at 40.2S 23.2W on 8 Apr; 1 at 4.7S, 15.7W on 24 Apr; 1 Ad at 4.2N, 19.2W on 26 Apr and 1A at 12.1N, 22.4W on 28th. Off Spitzbergen DB recorded a single bird at 76.2N, 15.7E on 27 Jul; 3 at 73.8N, 14.4E on 30 Jul, and 1 at 64.2N, 10.1E on 1 Aug. **Arctic Skua** *Stercorarius parasiticus*. Off Alibag at 18.6N, 72.7E SPN reported 13 on 6 Oct, while further south off Kerala at 9.4N, 76.4E, 24 were reported.

## GULLS *Laridae*

**Glaucous Gull** *Larus hyperboreus*. Off the coast of Albert I Land DB reported 3 Ad at 79.6N, 10.1E on 28 Jul, while next day he noted 5 at 78.2N, 14.4E and an adult at 73.8N, 14.4E on 30 Jul. **Slender-billed Gull** *Chroicocephalus genei*. DB saw 1 in Sousse harbour on 31 Oct. **Little Gull** *Hydrocoloeus minutus*. In the Bosphorus NC recorded a flock of 30+ on 14 Oct. **Swallow-tailed Gull** *Creagrurus furcatus*. TT photographed and SC first saw 1 of these pelagic tropical gulls on 20 Apr at 10.8S, 80.9W and then mostly solitary birds with daily sightings into the Gulf of Panama to 27th at 7S, 79.5W. **Ivory Gull** *Pagophila eburnean*. SGC reports small numbers seen throughout the season (Jul and Aug) with the maxima on 9 Aug in heavy drift ice at a bear kill. Over the course of several hours the count went from 3 to 30; all were adults. The only juvenile of the season was in heavy drift ice on 27 Aug at 79.1N, 25.8E.

## TERNES *Sterninae*

**Little Tern** *Sternula albifrons*. SC and TT in the Gulf of Guinea, recorded small groups totalling 17 on 22 Jul at 6N, 1.5E and next day a group of 25 at 6.1N, 3.8E.

## ALCIDS *Alcidae*

**Little Auk** *Alle alle*. Cruising off Spitzbergen DB recorded 20/h at 76.2N, 15.7E and 130/h at 76.9N, 14.3E on 27 Jul, while next day 500–600/h at 79.24N, 10.2E. On 29th 160–200/h were noted at 78.2N, 13.6E. Also off SW Spitzbergen SGC reported 670 in one hour at 76.4N, 15.4E on 3 Aug. **Thick-billed Murre** *Uria lomvia*. Off SW Spitzbergen SGC reported 4 at 76.5N, 15.2E on 25 Jul. Off the coast of Albert I Land DB reported 10/h at 79.2N, 10.2E on 28 Jul, while next day he noted a group of 4 at 78.2N 14.4E. Off NW Spitzbergen SGC reported 23 at the ice edge at 79.9N, 11.4E on 1 Sep. **Black Tystie** *Cephus grille*. **Atlantic Puffin** *Fratercula arctica*. Cruising in high latitudes SGC reported small numbers throughout the season with a maximum of 67 on 1 Sep in the vicinity of open drift ice at the northern end of Raudfjord, 78.8 N, 11.9E.

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## Acknowledgement

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- 1 2012 Cahow Recovery Program Report, Government of Bermuda, Dept. of Conservation Services
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- 3 Outside of breeding they are found in an area 5–15°N 30–40°W, Zuzana Zajková pers comm.
- 4 Movements and at-sea activity of Boyd's Shearwaters *Puffinus boydi* using geolocators and stable isotope analysis Zuzana Zajková, Santi Guallar, Teresa Militão, Jacob González-Solís. Institut de Recerca de la Biodiversitat (IRBio) and Dept. Biologia Animal, Universitat de Barcelona, Spain.
- 5 <http://www.surfbirds.com/communityblogs/amigo/2014/10/05/shy-albatross-off-the-south-african-coast>
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# A new extinct petrel from the Chatham Islands

by Dr WRP Bourne

Alan Tennyson, Jo Cooper and Lara Shepherd have just described a new supposedly extinct gadfly petrel *Pterodroma imberi* on the strength of the DNA of a bone from the Chatham Island off New Zealand (*Bull. Brit. Orn. Club* 135: 267–277). It seems possible this may be an unidentified grey and white bird collected by Rollo Beck off the Antipodes Islands in the American Museum of Natural History (*Notornis* 42:78, 1995), and its DNA should be checked.

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# Landbirds from ships at sea

by Lieutenant Chris Patrick RN

There is a Pacific theme to this report with all 4 observers providing records for this region.

Species not previously mentioned in these reports include Pygmy Swiftlet, Pacific Imperial Pigeon, Yellow-bibbed Fruit Dove, Buff-winged Cincloides and Sulphur-throated Finch.

All dates refer to 2014 unless otherwise shown. Reports of landbirds at sea were received from the following observers:

**Simon Cook (SCo)** - Auckland, New Zealand to New Britain, Papua New Guinea, December 2013 to January 2014 and *MV Ortelius*, Iceland and Greenland, September 2014

**WO1 Tony Tindale (ADT)** - *HMS Protector*, South Atlantic deployment and return via Pacific and Caribbean then Gulf of Guinea, December 2013 to August 2014

**WO1 Steve Copsey (SCC)** - *HMS Protector*, South Pacific and Caribbean then Gulf of Guinea, April to August 2014

**Lt Chris Patrick (CP)** - *HMS Illustrious*, Philippines, November and December 2013, UK waters, April to June 2014 and *RFA Wave Knight*, Northeast Atlantic, November 2014



Plate 92. Pygmy Swiftlet *HMS Illustrious*, Philippines. © C Patrick

## North Atlantic (East of 30°W) and Bay of Biscay

In the Gulf of Guinea TT and SCC saw a Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* 23 NM W of Cameroon at 02.5N 009.43E on 26 Jul. On 1 Aug whilst 18NM NE of São Tome they recorded a Little Swift *Apus affinis*.

In the vicinity of Scoresby Sund, Greenland, on 7 Sep SCo had a black-spotted, white phase Gyr Falcon *Falco rusticolus* which flew past the ship just a few yards away. Three days later, 8 miles off shore in the same area, another white phase Gyr Falcon landed on an iceberg and was joined by a second bird. On 11 September, whilst 70NM N of Iceland, a flock of 102 Barnacle Geese *Branta leucopsis* were seen flying south. Two days later 57 Pink-footed Geese *Anser brachyrhynchus* flew low SE 92NM N of Iceland. Later that afternoon, when 48 NM off the coast, a Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* (an Icelandic rarity) was seen flying around the ship. At the same time an unidentified Pipit *Anthus sp* was also seen. A couple of hours later a winter-plumaged male Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis* took refuge on the ship.

CP found a Redwing *Turdus iliacus* which spent a hour onboard *RFA Wave Knight* on 17 Nov, whilst 200NM NW of Hebrides.

## English Channel, North Sea, Irish Sea, Norwegian Sea and Baltic

CP had a Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris* onboard 6NM NW of the Isle of Man on 4 Apr. At 1000 on 7 Jun a Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* flew past the ship heading N, 20NM S of Lizard Point and at 2000 a House Martin *Delichon urbica* was seen flying in the same direction.

## North Atlantic (West of 30°W)

TT and SCC had a Barn Swallow 35NM off the coast of South Carolina on 8 May.

## Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean

On 5 May whilst 70NM W of Grand Cayman, TT and SCC saw a Barn Swallow and a Cattle Egret. The following evening, as they passed 55NM NW of Cuba, they had





**Plate 93.** Chuck-will's-widow, *HMS Protector*, vicinity Grand Cay. © S Copey

singles of Palm Warbler (male) *Setophaga palmarum*, Purple Martin *Progne subis*, Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*, Chuck-will's-widow *Caprimulgus carolinensis* and 5 Barn Swallows. The next morning they saw 3 Sanderling *Calidris alba*, 35NM N of Cuba.

#### **Pacific, China Sea, Yellow Sea, Coral Sea and Philippine Sea**

On 29 Nov 2013, during a gap between thunderstorms, CP photographed a flock of 30 Pygmy Swiftlets *Collocalia troglodytes* which spent 15 minutes flying around *HMS Illustrious* in the Visayan Sea near Calagnaan Island, central Philippines. On 13 Dec 2013 in the central South China Sea an eastern Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba lugens* landed onboard.

On 29 Dec 2013, just off Norfolk Island, SCO watched a Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* fly past the ship. On New Year's Day, from the ship at Port Vila, Efate Island, Vanuatu he had a Swamp Harrier *Circus approximans*. The following day, as the ship approached Luganville, Espiritu Santo, Vanuatu he recorded 100+ Uniform Swiftlet *Collocalia vanikorensis* and another Swamp Harrier. Of note whilst alongside the dock at Luganville was a Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* onboard. This species is not mentioned for Vanuatu in the Birds of Melanesia by Guy Dutson and could possibly be the first record.

On 3 Jan, approaching Vanikoro Island, Santa Cruz Islands, Solomon Islands, 2 Uniform Swiftlets were observed - one seen from 0905 to 0915 at 12° 14' S, 166° 52' E, 32 nm S of Vanikoro, going steadily north towards the island and very close to the ship, which was heading 350°. Another was seen from 0916 to 1032 keeping pace with the ship (it too was heading north) and was lost to sight ahead of the ship just before the island came into view.

On 4 Jan, 1NM off Ndeni Island, Solomon Islands, a Ruddy Turnstone flew around the ship briefly and 4 Pacific Imperial Pigeons *Ducula pacifica* were seen from the ship.



**Plate 94.** Eastern Pied Wagtail on boards *HMS Illustrious*. © C Patrick



Plate 95. Peregrine Falcon on board HMS Protector 100nm W of the Ecuador - Colombia border. © S Copsey

The following day just before the ship anchored at Santa Ana Island, Solomon Islands, a Pacific Imperial Pigeon, a dark phase Pacific Reef Egret *Zonotrichia capensis*, a Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* and 3 Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus* were seen.

At 0630 on 6 Jan at 09° 21' S, 160° 09' 4NM offshore from Honiara, Guadalcanal, a male Yellow-bibbed Fruit Dove *Ptilinopus solomonensis* was photographed onboard but had been first seen around 23.00 the previous evening. On the dockside 8 Tree Sparrows were seen. A small colony of these sparrows is mentioned in Dutson.

Near Vangunu Island, New Georgia, Solomon Islands, on 7 Jan a female Yellow-bibbed Fruit Dove was found dead on the upper deck at 05.00, 6 Brahminy Kites were seen and a Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis* was watched hawking for insects. At 06.50 the following day in the Solomon Sea at 07° 05' S, 155° 04' E, 28 nm SE of Bougainville, an (Eastern) Great Egret *Egretta alba modesta* was seen flying in a SSW direction.

TT recorded a Buff-winged Cinclodes *Cinclodes fuscus* at 45.5S 075.67W, 35NM W of the Chilean coast on 12 Apr. Having been joined by SCC on 19 Apr they witnessed 6 Cattle Egrets flying N 230NM SW of Lima, Peru at 1600 then the following morning another was seen 170NM W of the Peruvian

coast. At lunchtime on 22 Apr 50NM W of northern Peru at 03.33S 081.57W they saw a Tropical Kingbird *Tyrannus melancholicus* and just over an hour later a Sulphur-throated Finch *Sicalis taczanowskii*. After crossing the equator, on the morning of 24 Apr whilst 100NM W of the Ecuador/Columbia border an immature Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* was followed 2 hours later by an adult. Two days later they recorded a juvenile Peregrine Falcon 160NM off the Colombian coast at 04.17N 080.17W.

### South Atlantic

An Eared Dove *Zenaida auriculata* was found by TT onboard HMS Protector on 14 Dec 2013, 45NM off the coast of northern Argentina, at 36.87S 055.73W. On 21 Dec 2013 at 39.37S 052.63W, 250NM off the Argentine coast, he had a Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*. A female White-bibbed Finch *Melanodera melanodera* was onboard 60NM NE of southern Argentina, at 53.73S 064.23W, on 30 Mar. The following day and 30NM further NE, a Rufous-collared Sparrow *Zonotrichia capensis* visited the ship. The same or another Rufous-collared Sparrow was onboard on 1 Apr, when the White-bibbed Finch was unfortunately found dead.

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Plate 96. Black-throated Accentor.

## A first for Bulgaria - Black-throated Accentor

by Andy Williams

*Andy Williams has degrees in marine biology, and marine and fisheries science and from 2002–2008 served in Diego Garcia as the senior fishery protection officer, working alongside Royal Navy personnel. (All photographs by the author)*

In October 2013 I was sent to the Black Sea in a seismic survey vessel to monitor cetacean activity. This particular area, being heavily polluted and largely land-locked, has a tiny population of cetaceans and relatively few seabirds, and this meant that I was able to study the steady progression of migrating birds. At first a daily passage of meadow pipits, chaffinches, robins and wrens was apparent, with many birds landing on deck. My daily cetacean watches began at first light each day, and I took great delight in walking the decks to see what the latest fall of birds had delivered. The first to excite my interest were Red-breasted Flycatchers. These were followed by a Serin, a number of Black Redstarts, a flyby Red-footed Falcon and a Red-backed Shrike - this last individual spent three days on board, working its way through the flycatchers.

Southerly migration continued for a week or so and then the willow warblers and chiffchaffs turned up - often 20 or 30 birds could be seen flitting around the decks. One morning I walked on deck to find that Siberian species were arriving - more RBF's too, but also Yellow-browed Warblers, and a single Pallas's Warbler - the icing on the cake for me.

I have been fortunate to see both of these wonderful warblers in Britain, but just fleeting glimpses as they have flitted through vegetation, and I never expected to get such great views as the ones offered here. I was actually called to the wheelhouse by the OOW to rescue the Pallas's as it had flown through the open watertight door and was caught between a sunblind and the window. After carefully extricating the bird and



**Plate 97.** Pallas's Warbler in wheelhouse.



**Plate 98.** Yellow-browed Warbler.

returning it to the open deck it just sat on a tarpaulin and appeared to scowl at me whilst I took its photograph.

I was up earlier than usual the following day and went on deck in the gloomy half light to see what might be about. I stood motionless for a while, letting my eyes adjust to the low light for I knew from previous sore shins that the deck was littered with a variety of pipes and ducts that constituted a maze of trip hazards. I then noticed a small bird silhouette moving jerkily across the deck. Although I could not see any plumage detail I sensed from the jizz of the bird that it was

a Dunnock, and I was rather pleased about this for it was another addition to my voyage species list. The sun broke the horizon and with the improving light conditions I could suddenly see that my 'dunnock' had a huge, pale supercilium, and I realised it was an accentor! Only an obsessive birder can understand the excitement and near panic I then felt as I tried to get a record shot. With no previous experience of accentors I was desperate to get a photograph as I had no idea what species it could be, although Siberian Accentor was a good bet. The bird stubbornly stayed in the shaded areas but

**Plate 99.** Red-breasted Flycatcher.





**Plates 100–102.** Black-throated Accentor.

eventually afforded slightly better views and I managed a couple of shots before it flew onto the safety netting and disappeared over the side of the ship. Once my watch was over I sorted through my photographs, checked my ID guide and gleefully recorded my first ever Black-throated Accentor. At the time I had no appreciation of the significance of this record but a casual mention of the bird via email to a colleague prompted a response of 'wow! - that's a really difficult bird to get in the Western Palearctic!' I then looked up the official bird list for Bulgaria

and found that this species had never been recorded in that country. I carefully checked the ship's log to get an accurate position and realized that the bird was well inside Bulgarian territorial waters. I submitted the photographs with a written description and subsequently got a very nice email from the head of the Bulgarian records committee advising me that they had accepted my record as a first for Bulgaria.

**Andy Williams**

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# South Georgia Report

by Alison Neil, Chief Executive, the South Georgia Heritage Trust

A remarkable chapter drew to a close on the sub-Antarctic island of South Georgia on 23 March 2015. The South Georgia Heritage Trust concluded the baiting phase of its multi-year project to remove the invasive rodents which have destroyed most of the native birds in one of the world's most important seabird sanctuaries.

During the third and final phase of fieldwork in 2015, 95 tonnes of bait were laid by the Trust's helicopters over an area of 364 square kilometres. The three month field operation involved almost 350 flying hours, 260 bait pods, and 350 drums of aviation fuel. On 23 March, bait was spread over the last rat-infested area of the island to be treated. It would only take a matter of days for the island to be potentially rodent-

free, although success can not be declared for a further two years.

Already South Georgia's seabird population has responded in areas where the furry tyrants have been removed. In January the first South Georgia Pipit nest was discovered in an area cleared of rodents, Schlieper Bay on the South coast of the North-West baiting zone at Weddell Point. This area was treated in May 2013 as part of Phase 2 of the project. The pipit nest, containing five chicks, was discovered by none other than Sally Poncet, a former member of Team Rat and expert on the wildlife of South Georgia. This thrilling news shows the rapid impact of the Habitat Restoration Project on this potentially endangered species.



Plate 103. South Georgia Pipit. © S Copsey



**Plate 104.** South Georgia Pintail. © S Copsey

Project Director, Professor Tony Martin, Professor of Animal Conservation from the University of Dundee explains what the completion of baiting work will mean to the island's wildlife: "When I first began coming to this magical island 20 years ago, I only dreamed that it could one day be free of rats, and now because of our work, I can say that it is very likely that South Georgia is now rat free. Already the South Georgia pipit, the world's most southerly songbird, and South Georgia pintails, both endemic species found only here, are returning in numbers we could never have imagined, along with other species which were the victims of rats. But it will take decades, even centuries, before the birdlife returns to the numbers which existed before man - and rodents - arrived."

But the story is far from over. The Habitat Restoration Project now enters a new phase, which will include intensive monitoring to identify whether the baiting phase has been successful, and sharing the experience and lessons learned in order to contribute to the future success of other eradications around the world.

**Alison Neil**

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# Italian Update

by Mark Walters

The last few years in Italy have seen considerable observer effort in several coastal regions, notably Liguria, Tuscany, Lazio and Campania on Italy's western seaboard, and the northern Adriatic, the Marches and Basilicata to the East. Inspired by the nationwide Morus project (2008–2012) to monitor marine species, with its particular focus on gannet (*Morus bassana*), seawatching has definitely taken off: pelagic trips are run in several regions, beaches are monitored with greater frequency, and telescopes are now a more familiar sight at river mouths, on headlands and at other hotspots for pelagic biodiversity. Nature photography, especially in southern Italy, both on a professional and amateur basis, has expanded the pool of potential observers, and has turned up some interesting records. Many of the photos end up in local Facebook pages

for birders and naturalists, ensuring a regular exchange of information and providing a further incentive for regular monitoring.

In April 2015 reports filtered through of a substantial group of Storm-petrels (*Hydrobates pelagicus*) in the Bay of Naples, roughly three nautical miles out of Naples in the direction of Capri. This was further corroborated by other sightings and photographs the following month (28 May) made by the same journalist, Giuseppe Farace. What were storm-petrels doing in the Bay of Naples during the breeding season, a considerable distance from their nearest known off-shore colonies? Could their range have expanded or might they have been non-breeding birds? Further observer effort will be needed to track this elusive species a little more closely.



**Plate 105.** RNBWS expedition to Regi Lagni canal mouth NW of Naples, March 7th 2015: from left, Kath and Robert Allan, Mark Walters. © M Giuseppe Di Nunzio





**Plate 106.** Arctic skua (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) resting in a decidedly suboptimal environment at the Regi Lagni canal mouth NW of Naples, June 24th 2015. © M Walters

Close examination of more common species sometimes pays dividends. Together with a local naturalist, Andrea Senese, while doing the International Waterbird Census in January, I came across a Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) which bore a legible ring. Thanks to the rapid exchange of information between ornithologists, it transpired that it had been ringed as a juvenile in Norway several years before. An article was subsequently published in the local on-line section of a national daily paper, *La Repubblica*.

With more regular pelagic trips in the Bay of Naples it was inevitable that a rarity would crop up sooner or later. In December 2014, right at the end of a pelagic trip out of Castellammare di Stabia, a gull in port attracted the attention of local ornithologist Davide De Rosa. It turned out to be a Franklin's Gull (*Larus pipixcan*), and this particular sighting was only Italy's second on record, and a first for Campania.

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Plate 107. Bridled Tern, Chagos Is. © PCarr

# Movement of the Bridled Tern and petrels with the monsoons

by Dr WRP Bourne

Rather little has been said about the effects of the Asiatic monsoons on seabird movements; in some cases they seem quite marked. For example, the Bridled Tern *Onychoprion anaethetus* breeds around the Arabian Sea in the northern spring and then migrates east with the SW Monsoon past Sri Lanka between August and October (De Silva 1987), while North Pacific breeding populations of Bulwer's Petrel *Bulweria bulwerii* and Swinhoe's and Matsudaira's Storm-petrels *Oceanodroma monorhis* and *O. matsudairae* migrate in the opposite direction (Bailey *et al.* 1968). Poole *et al.* (2014) now report that Bridled Terns and Swinhoe's Storm-petrels and a variety of

other species including the Aleutian Tern *Onychoprion aleuticus*, small skuas, and in spring Short-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus tenuirostris* which have presumably entered the Indian Ocean by mistake, can also be seen moving through the Malacca Strait off Singapore. While the Bridled Terns are apparently only seen on their eastbound autumn migration, it has been found with radar that on their return migration terns often fly fast and too high to be seen.

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Plate 108. Swinhoe's Storm-petrel. © FOlmos



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